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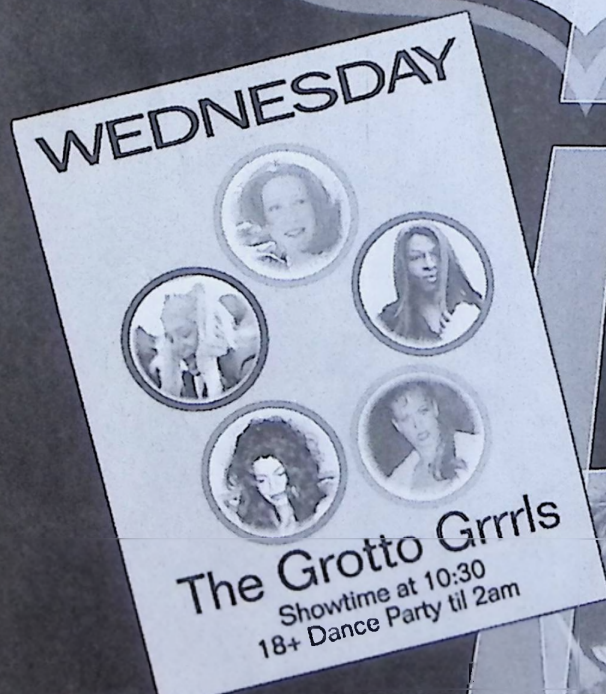
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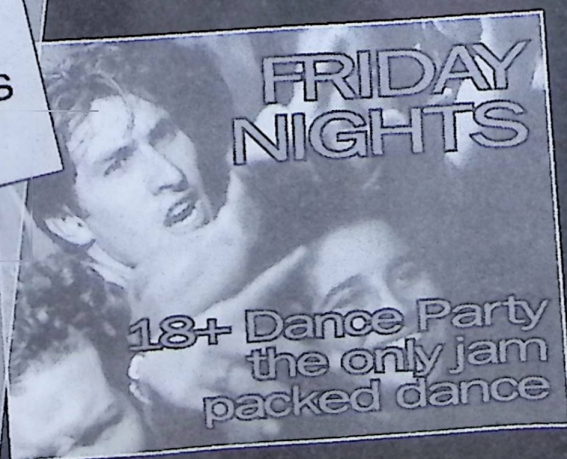
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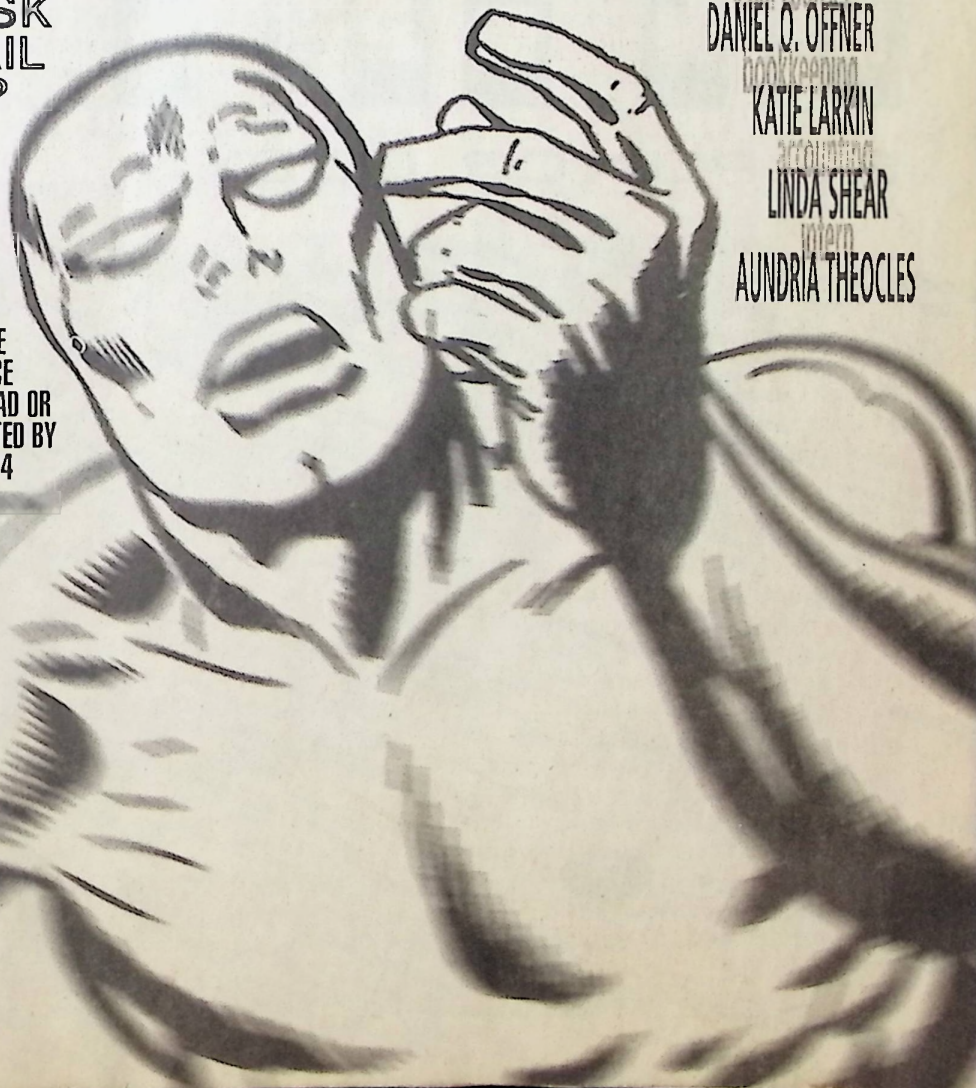
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DAVENING WITH THE BIG BOYS

BY PUNCO GODYN

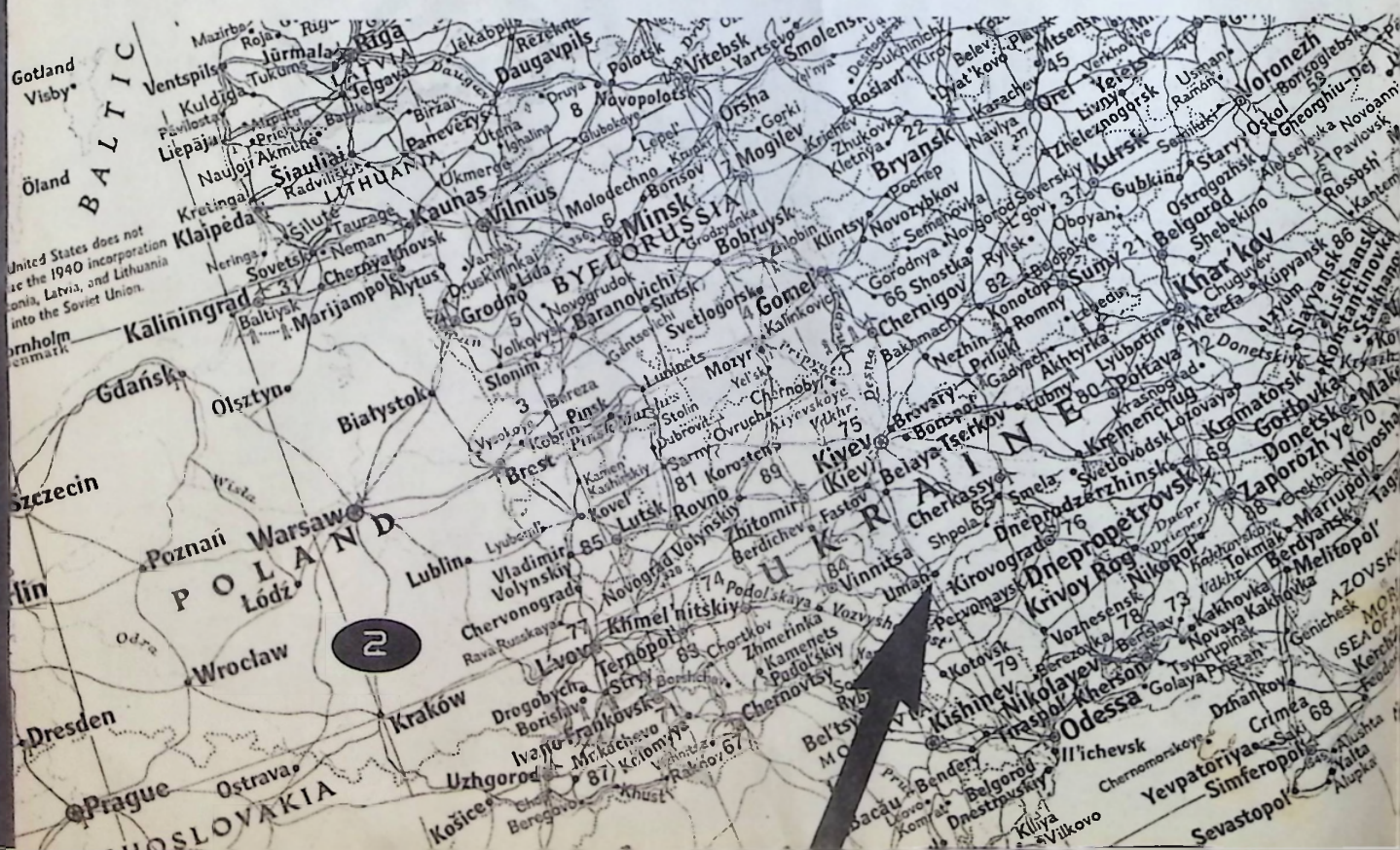
It's 2 a.m., Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and there is a Hasid sleeping in my kitchen.

He's sitting up, dressed to the nines in the silk, belted robe that they wear for holidays and the Sabbath. He wears his streimel, a round fur hat which to purchase in the States would set you back at least a grand. He has a book of the Talmud open before him on the kitchen table.

Sound asleep, he starts slowly tilting to the right. I'm up to use the bathroom, but I wait a minute to see if I need to catch him. Just in time, though, he awakens and rights himself, and nods off to sleep again.

Such is my life here in Uman, Ukraine, 1998. I'm packed in a Ukrainian three-room apartment with five Hasidic Jews, including a father visiting from Brooklyn with one of his 15 children.

The local who we've rented the apartment from shows up twice, swaying and reeking from vodka. He speaks no English, and I discover my



Ukrainian phrase book is next to useless. But I figure out that he seems to like me because I'm an American. He hugs me a couple of times and exuberantly indicates he enjoys hockey. He says something to the effect that he will only rent to Americans.

"No Israel," he says. "No Canada." Yeah, I think, you don't want to mess with those *Canadians*.

About 7,000 Jews, almost 100 percent black-hatted Hasidim hailing from New York and Israel, have descended on Uman to pray at the grave site of their Rebbe, Nachman of Breslov.

Rebbe Nachman was the great grandson of Rabbi Israel, the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Hassidic movement. Born in 1772 in the Ukrainian town of Medzeboz, Reb Nachman became a great holy man, mystic, teacher, and storyteller at a young age. In his last days he moved to Uman, which had been the site years before of a terrible pogrom. Succumbing to a years-long battle with tuberculosis, Rebbe Nachman died in 1810 at the age of thirty-eight.

He told his followers shortly before he died about the Tikkun Haklali, the "complete remedy" for a world of ills. The tikkun consists of the recitation of Psalms 16, 32, 41, 42, 59, 77, 90, 105, 137 and 150.

When Reb Nachman died, his followers never bothered to appoint a successor. They didn't need to.

"When my days are ended and I leave this world, I will intercede for anyone who comes to my grave, recites these Ten Psalms, and gives to charity. No matter how serious his sins and transgressions, I will do everything in my power to save him and cleanse him. I will span the length and breadth of Creation for him. By his payess I will pull him out of Gehinnom (Hell)!"

This sounded good to me. I thought I'd give it a try, even if I lack the payess.

Perhaps I should explain: I'm not Jewish. For about seven years I've been dancing around the idea of conversion. It's mostly been an internal struggle: I've basically been looking for some sort of sign that this is the right way for me to go. I've been needing that certain nudge (or is it nudzh?) into commitment.

I'm doing my best to hear that "still, small voice" that God speaks with, which I believe to have heard a few times. I just wish He could speak up sometimes. So I went off to find God, smack dab in the center of one of the more depressing places on the planet.

September 16. Sturbridge, MA to JFK Airport, New York.

Me and my traveling companion, a self-described "Breslover groupie," load our bags into a rental van bearing three Hasidim from Massachusetts. The driver tells me he is an electrician. Another passenger is a Web administrator, who looks sort of like red-haired actor William H. Macy, who played Joe Mantegna's partner in the film *Homicide*.

The third Hasid, an older fellow, asks me my name. I tell him. He stops to examine it and repeats it.

"That's a strange name," he says. "Do you have another name? A Hebrew name?"

"Not yet," I say. Not even out of New England yet, and my cover is blown.

"Wowie-zowie," he says. "Are you in for a trip?"

We get talking on the van, barreling its way to John F. Kennedy Airport, and he

tells me of the difficulty I will face. I think he's talking about the difficulties I will face in Uman, but he says, no, in America. I have to find a Rav, a teacher, he says. Indeed.

When we reach JFK, and we unload our luggage, this wonderful, thoughtful man whacks himself in the chin with a bungee-cord from his bag, and opens a scary-looking cut on his face. He bleeds all over the sidewalk, and onto the white van. This is the first strangely visceral experience of several that I will have on the trip. He holds a piece of ice to his face, and the First Aid stand people tell him the wound won't need stitches.

At this point, greater numbers of Hasidim start to file in, and I slowly begin to slip beneath the skin of a strange, enveloping feeling that will encompass me throughout the trip. As I meet and shake hands with an increasing number of men in black hats and coats, I have the sensation that I am not where I am standing. I will carry this feeling to Ukraine, where I will feel like I've never left home, and I will return with it, feeling that I haven't come back.

The American contingent boards the plane. We are a group of Hasidim: short Hasidim, fat Hasidim, old Hasidim, a few young boys with long payess and shaved heads. There is a tall Hasid with intense features who I learn is from Los Angeles, and sure enough, he sounds like it. I later learn that Breslovers don't have a standard "uniform," like some Hasidim, so there is an array of different hats and coats. The one thing they seem to have in common is poor eyesight: I note only a couple of guys who aren't wearing glasses.

This is going to be a men-only affair. The Orthodox standards of purity between the sexes are just too difficult a thing to prepare for, given the primitive conditions that lie ahead. It's going to be difficult enough bringing in our own food and water. I learn that women visit the Rebbe on Purim, a holiday that falls mid-winter.

It occurs to me that this

trip could be promoted in the Happy Valley, the home of self-improvement seminars, therapeutic retreats, and group hug-a-thons. One could sell this trip to Jewish men here as some sort of masculine retreat, a sort of Robert Bly thing, but with tefillin and tallis:

Come to Uman and Daven with the Big Boys! Spend a Week with the ORIGINAL Promise Keepers!

September 17, 8 a.m. Frankfurt Airport.

"Dee-deedeedee-deedeedee-deedeedee-deedeedee-dee..."

My traveling companion keeps singing the opening notes to "Mrs. Robinson," because the conveyor belt at the Frankfurt airport reminds him of the opening scene in "The Graduate." I grasp my bags, check to make sure my yarmulke is still on, and stare at the Germans staring back at me. I was in Germany fifteen years ago, studying German through a program at my college, a formerly august finishing school in the Northeast. It's quite a different world now.

Among my hopes upon signing up for the trip have been to possibly pick up a couple of Hasidic tricks for prayer. But as we wait for the connecting flight to Kiev, I realize any hopes I had of keeping up with these guys when it comes to davening have been completely dashed.

Picture about seventy Hasidim, each praying at different rates and having started at different points in the morning, or Shacharis, service. Large German jets taxi on the runway outside. Tourists stare at us, some flatly flabbergasted at the sight. Is it because they/we are Jews, or simply because they/we are praying in public, which is enough of a spectacle?

Crowds stare at us/them. What group do I belong to in this crowd, anyway? I'm ignored by the Hasidim mostly, perhaps because the only head covering I have available is this knitted rainbow color hippie-hat that I picked up last minute at a head shop in Northampton. I try to follow in my Artscroll edition prayerbook, but I feel like I am going to lose my mind, lightheaded from a slight case of airsickness, with a clammy neck, and deprived of sleep. I'm just focusing on the English prayers.

They stop and start again. A ram's horn is blown several times, the note and the moment incongruous and beautiful. With two hours to kill after the service, the duty free shops become peppered with lone Hasidim. A teenager changes one dollar of mine into German money for me. I'm not sure why.

The anonymous quality of the airport makes me feel like I could just as well be in Chicago or Cleveland. I read two pamphlets a Hasid gives me about Rebbe Nachman after I donate \$20 to his synagogue. The pamphlets both deal with marriage in some way. Rebbe Nachman seemed rather pre-occupied with sex. I get a laminated copy of the Tikkun Haklali. I read repeated references to the fact that the Tikkun will help cure me of nocturnal emissions.

September 18. I think.

Pandemonium. The transition from Frankfurt to Kiev to Uman is a blur. What I remember most about Kiev is the fellow who checked my passport and visa, a real testimony to the heritage of Communist efficiency. In a little cubicle with no phone, no computer, and just a list of names, he sits with a blank expression. Never once do I see a Ukrainian smile. Having found my name on the list, he executes the final procedure, which consists of doing nothing whatsoever for a period of about three minutes. This is apparently in some instruction manual, because I saw the same thing done in old East Berlin 15 years ago, as well as at the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles. I

guess they all get trained in the same place.

From there, it's a lot of screaming, dragging my bags, and getting stuffed onto a bus for a five-hour trip to Uman. I'm told the Ukrainian Mafia used to block buses and take collections for protection money, but now we apparently have the Ukrainian military to protect us. Oh, joy.

After a pit-stop in the woods which turns into an afternoon prayer service, we finally make our way to Uman, under cover of darkness. After about an hour or so of sitting in the bus, breathing in the exhaust fumes, the local gendarmes get on the bus and explain that we have to "register" our passports with the local authorities. I get a creepy feeling about this.

Comrade Cop tells us that the "registration" will consist of each of us heading over to the bank across the street and handing the teller three American dollars, cash. She will then give us a form that we are to hand back to the police. The Israelis dutifully ignore the entire procedure and head straight to their rooms. The Americans are obedient, and we head to the bank.

The lone teller takes our money, and passes each bill through a small machine whose apparent design is to check for counterfeit bills. This is apparently to fight the conspiracy of American Jews to pump the Ukrainian economy with bogus \$1 bills. Every third or fourth bills makes the machine's alarm go off. As any bank teller would do when presented counterfeit money, she hands the dollar back and asks for another.

Somehow in all this mess I find the guy who organizes much of this trip, an urbane looking fellow in what looks like a golfer's cap. He's a rabbi actually, but his computer business and organizing this trip keeps him pretty much out of the rabbi business, I hear. He gives me my room assignment, and I head off to my digs.

"Meester, meester, I take

your bags for you?"

Hundreds of Ukrainians crowd up against the buses, offering to rent apartments or carry bags. Exhausted, I take up a young man's offer to carry my bags. As we walk farther and farther to my building, I notice there aren't many street lights. Jeesh, this guy could club you and make off with all your tuna, I think. But he doesn't: he tells me he is a student at the local agricultural college. I give him \$2 and an apple, and I feel like Mr. American Big Shot.

Words fail me to describe the room. Falling somewhere between "dive" and "hovel," it is thankfully clean. Or clean-ish, in a third world sort of way. We have running water twice a day, always cold. You don't want to drink it because we're downstream from Chernobyl. I've packed six liters of water in part so I can brush my teeth. There's a gas stove, but it never gets used. Getting this kitchen kosher would likely entail burning the building down.

They've stuffed seven of us into a three-room apartment. I sleep on a cot frame with a rug thrown over it. I sleep a deep, thankful snooze.

September 18. Really.

I walk around. We live on Pushkin Street, what passes for the main road in this section of Uman, a city with 90,000 people that looks like someone dropped a few high-rises in the middle of Savoy, Mass. They stopped calling it "the" Ukraine years ago, after the Soviets left, taking the "the" with them, and apparently everything else of value. I decide that the city seal for Uman should be a rusty crane, after the series of cranes and accompanying unfinished buildings that line the streets.

My first day is a blur, during which I get over my discomfort with crowds. Several times a day I find myself in a human sea flowing slowly from location to location. The Israelis help me get over my cramped social bubble. Apparently in Israel they have developed some novel uses for the human elbow as a navigational tool.

In the process they seemed to have lost any kind of expression resembling "sorry" or "excuse me." I'm going to have to try some of these techniques on the slack-jawed tourists in Thornes Market when I get home, I think.

I'm not sure what day it is. It might be the eve of Shabbos, the Sabbath, so I better find out. That's kind of an important day.

I get really depressed. Sometimes there's occasional sunshine, when I see a face familiar from the trip over. But most of the time that submerged feeling I'm getting seems to be choking me: often I feel like I am going to lose my sanity. I'm afraid I won't find whatever I was looking for here. But then, I'm not really quite sure what I was looking for. I will die never being able

to say the prayers as fast as these guys. Or will I?

So far I've davened pretty much alone, as I can't coherently find my place in any of the various prayer groups that crop up around the crowded Tzion, the Rebbe's grave site. Looking at all the trash littered around and the bustling crowds, I suddenly get unhappy with the whole structure of how we seem to be treating the Ukrainians, renting out their homes for a week for \$130, and getting their services for some spare change.

One of my roommates, a muscle-bound American who enlisted in the Israeli army a few years ago, reminds me that there's nobody to feel sorry for here. After all, these are the same people who needed little prodding during the Holocaust.

Nazi: Hey, uh, friend
Ukrainian, could you, uh, you
know...well...

Ukrainian: Kill some Jews? No
problem, bud!

BLUE HERON URBAN WEAR / URBAN GEAR

- CAFFEINE
- KIKWEAR
- FRESH JIVE
- LITHIUM
- GREED GIRL
- BUG GIRL
- PORN STAR
- STUSSY
- STORM
- HENNA TATTOOS
- BODY JEWELRY
- USED CORDS
- USED SWEATERS
- USED LEATHERS



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Our little arrangement seems to work for them, though. From renting his apartment out to five or seven Jews for a week, the Ukrainian makes about three times his annual salary. I'd live in a car for a week for that. Well, maybe not my car. Maybe an Impala.

Time to get some sleep. It's 11:30 a.m.

4:20 p.m.

I've considered this a journey to learn from thousands of tzaddikim, but outside of a few friendly people, this has been pretty lonely so far.

My roommates for the most part completely ignore me, which on the plus side allows me to quietly observe them about their daily tasks. Every free moment is an opportunity to pray. I'm reminded of the fact that I always carry a book with me in case I end up in a situation with nothing to do. These guys do that, but it's a prayer book they carry. Every little activity has significance, and a holiness, if you will. One roommate won't get out of bed until he has washed his hands in a basin he keeps by the bed, because the law states that you should only walk a few paces from bed before saying that blessing.

My roommates don't seem too upset, though perhaps a little bewildered, when I explain my status as a proto-convert. One roommate, whom everyone seems to rely on as the frum de la frum, says that's fine, as long as I don't completely observe all the prohibitions of the Sabbath. I should choose one mitzvah to break, he says. Once I get my (Orthodox) conversion, then I can observe Shabbos complete, he tells me.

So which one to break? Oh, the choices! Ultimately, I decide to not cut my toilet paper into individual pieces before Shabbos, as they are doing. The mere act of tearing a sheet of TP is seen as a violation of the commandment not to work on Saturday.

There is a constant undertone of voices around me in the room. Conversations and prayer. They speak mostly Yiddish, which I can understand a little from my knowledge of German. There's definitely the feeling of being in another time, another culture. Or perhaps another dimension: Judaism is sort of like that. You're occupying the same space as the rest of the world, but somehow it's a little different.

I speak with one roommate, who asks me where I live. I tell him Northampton, Massachusetts. "Ah, yes," he says. "I do business there. That's near New Hampshire, isn't it?" Last night, the 13-year-old boy asks if it's all right for him to "close the light." It's odd hearing a boy use an expression that a native speaker of English wouldn't use. It's something my elderly German grandmother would say. This kid is from Boro Park.

For me, there's nothing to do, so I get increasingly sleepier sitting on this terrible bed with a rug for a mattress. The food they serve here, shipped in from Israel and served in a vacated factory, is, well, okay, but I haven't had much of an appetite. But it is these conditions what I was hoping for in part, I think. So, cleanse away, soul.

September 20.

Shabbos comes and changes everything, of course. As it always does.

It didn't start that way. Friday night I went to pray at the Rebbe's grave, and once again was overcome by the conglomeration of minyanim, none of which I could follow. I stood on a stone wall overlooking the scene and put down my head. I think I was overwhelmed and lonely. I thought, by what right do I have to appropriate this culture? My approach has utterly been a sham. I will always be an outsider here.

I went to dinner in a deep funk, and ate alone at a fully laden table. No one would sit with me. I left, intent on going home and to bed. But I ran

into my original traveling companion and his son, and I had *another* Shabbos dinner, which was great.

We talked about meeting the next morning for Shacharis, but I could never find them. Still, I did finally find the main synagogue.

An Israeli organization has started construction on a 2,000-seat synagogue, which I guess would seat the entire Jewish population of the country. There is also a mikveh, or ritual bath, nearby. The synagogue is an imposing structure, even though it's only about half of what it's completed height is planned to be. It's mostly concrete of a substandard Ukrainian quality, with a tin roof, and large sheets of plastic flapping in the breeze where windows will be some day. The seats are narrow wooden planks on metal frames. Today, and on Rosh Hashanah, this is the most beautiful place in the world.

In the main shul I follow the service a little better. Afterwards, I went home. It was at this point that I forgot to eat, so blissed-out was I, but also suffering from what I thought might have been a case of traveler's diarrhea. Like my roommates, I slept most of the day. Afternoon services followed, and a lecture, and then evening services in the big shul.

For Havdalah, the prayers and sampling of spices, drinking of wine, and lighting of a candle to bid the Sabbath adieu, Hasidim crowd around the old rabbi performing the service. In their excitement they clamber all around him, standing on the pews and clambering into the rafters. Somehow, I don't think this is something that I could introduce into practice at the synagogue back home.

With nothing in my belly other than some powerful antibiotics which I'd taken for the Montezuma's Revenge, I decided to walk to the dining hall and see if there was anything left to nosh. Walking down the hill in the darkness, my foot disappeared into some black hole, and I went tumbling.

The pain in my ankle was

excruciating. I felt my consciousness slipping. *Don't do this, don't do this*, I said to myself. Only for some strange reason, I was saying it in a German-Yiddish patois, perhaps because of the Yiddish I was submerged in: "*Tue das nit! Tue das nit!*" Everything went black, and I crumpled in a heap.

I awoke being helped up by what appeared to be a Sephardic man, dark-complected, with long gray payess. He was saying something in Hebrew to me. It wasn't exactly encouraging, but he seemed a little amused. I guess this sort of thing happens there often. He walked off, and a few moments later I passed out again.

I managed to make my way to my traveling companion's apartment, where I ate some tuna and enlisted a walk home. I finally ate some of my canned herring, peanut butter and matzah, and went to sleep.

I decided to skip the first service today, which started at 3 a.m., and will skip the later morning services as well, so I can rest. I will go to the Tzion to pray the Tikkun HaKlali and then go to afternoon services. I was feeling much better. I think one of my roommates is upset at my abrogation of prayers.

September 21.

I've learned that Mashiach, the Messiah, has arrived, and he's living down Pushkin Street from me. It turns out that he's staying in my traveling companion's apartment. He's a cheery enough fellow with a white knitted kip-pah, and I observe him lounging around with his buddies. No one seems terribly upset that this guy is saying he is the Messiah, but the word gets around.

His friends certainly aren't doing anything to discourage him; in fact, they play it up a little. It seems funny to me that he's encouraged, because, while the belief in the Messiah is part of traditional Jewish belief, you'd think there'd be a little more discomfort with a guy claiming to be the anointed one. After all, the two famous cases of Jewish guys claiming to be Mashiach resulted in, well, Christianity ('nuff said), and Sabbatai Zvi, who converted to Islam at knifepoint in the late 1600s.

People come to talk to Mashiach, but his friends hold off the inquiries, saying "Mashiach is not receiving visitors at this time."

Mashiach keeps seven clocks by his bed, because, being the Mashiach, he needs to know what time it is in many time zones. On Shabbos, a little argument erupts over the Messiah wanting to turn on a light, a clear violation of the law. His roommate, a lone and exasperated American declares:

"I don't care who's meshuggeh, the light stays off!"

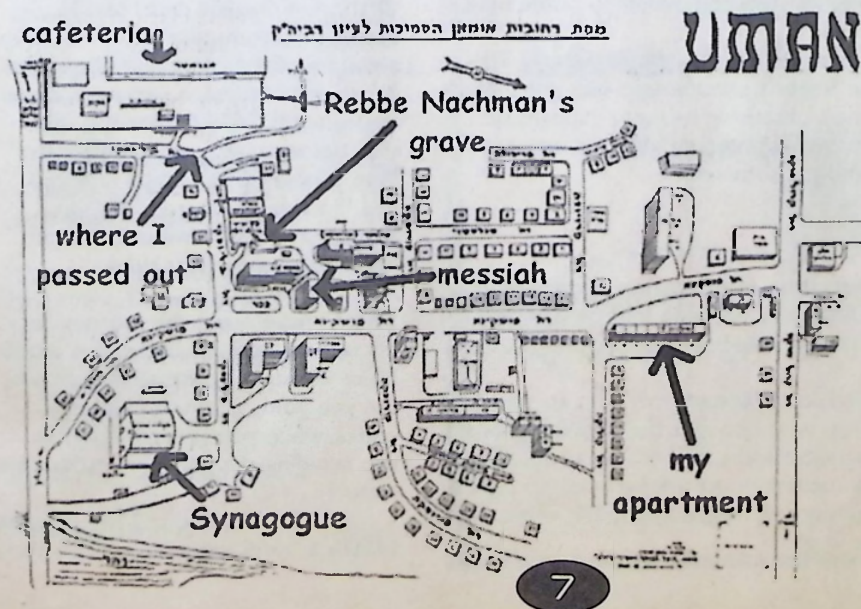
I finally make it to the Tzion to pray the Tikkun. Elbow to elbow with men cramming the small shelter, I recite my transliterated text. It takes me about a half hour, I think. I don't feel high afterwards, I don't feel anything special or spiritual. I just feel the satisfaction of having accomplished something I set out to do.

I spend a lot of money. Not on anything in particular, just charity. I had considered buying a tallis, but the guy selling them left. All the books and tapes are all in Hebrew, so I don't buy any of those. I start giving money away to the kids, and adults begging for tzedaka, charity. I give some money to an older fellow, who looks Indian, and he places his hand on my forehead and blesses me. I run out of singles, and start giving twenties. Thankfully, one guy has change: some of the kids will only take singles. Another guy wants me to give him money to have something with my grandfather's name put up at the Tzion. As my grandfather probably wouldn't have appreciated that, I make do by giving the fellow another \$20. I don't know if I feel like a big shot, but it does make me feel warm for a while.

September 22.

Rosh Hashanah is here! I am at a loss for words. What can you say on the Birthday of the World? It is a strange time. Rosh Hashanah starts a ten-day period ending in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, a week in which the names of the penitent are written into the Book of Life for a year. It is the time to appeal before the Judge, and rejoice that one can appeal before the Judge.

We spend the entire day, from about 5 a.m., until after 4 p.m., in the synagogue praying. I'm in the cheap seats, so the song of the cantor comes filtered through hundreds of Hasidim, most wearing the traditional white kittel, the gown reminiscent of the burial shroud.



Men shake and vibrate and sway. Even the so-called silent prayer, the Amidah, the innermost nut of the service, is punctuated with sound. Men hold their hands open, aloft, as if to accept or plead before the Creator. As we recount our sins in the Amidah, some of the men emit a deep "Oy", or more like an "Oooooeeugh" from their diaphragms. One can't help but follow suit.

Eventually, one becomes mesmerized by the service, even if you can't follow along. It gets you in the gut. I am at first alarmed and then excited by a particular liturgical habit of the Breslovers: they applaud. At a high point in the service, we welcome the King, and the crowd, as they say, goes wild. Clapping clatters like bats through this makeshift shul, and it feels like an explosion.

In the afternoon we all amble down to what passes for a lake in Uman, and cast our sins out on the water in the Tashlich ceremony. I'm feeling woozy, but in a good way, this time not because of the antibiotics, but something else, less nameable. Hundreds upon hundreds of Hasidim stand around the water, reciting the Tashlich prayers, with some others thrown in. It is an amazing sight.

At night, we eat like we are preparing for a long journey into the Land With No Food. There is gefilte fish, bread, dates, apples, mashed potatoes, and a couple of unrecognizable stews. I pass on the meat, which though killed and prepared in the acceptable manner, has a certain, um, *horsy* smell and a greenish color.

I learn, to my considerable disappointment, that Breslovers are teetotalers. But that doesn't mean they can't boogie. Still decked out in their kitels, which now look for all the world like kitchen smocks, they form a long elliptical ring in the dining hall and sing their theme song. I translate:

"Uman, Uman, Rosh Hashanah! Uman, Uman, Rosh Hashanah! What happiness! What a good lot in life! To be worthy to be here with our Rebbe!"

Someone grabs me, and I join the ring. I dance, too, if you want to call gaily shuffling in a circle dancing. I guess this is what you would call my *Fiddler on the Roof* moment. The singing goes on late into the night, for both nights of the holiday. These last couple of days I have made a few acquaintances, so it's not as lonely as it has seemed. I repeatedly find and eat with a fellow whom I bond with simply because he speaks English and he doesn't wear a black hat. The crowd is speckled with these guys, somewhat confused-looking American Jews who, like me, somehow felt compelled to come here but who may feel in a little over their heads.

I head over to the Tzion for a quiet moment with the Rebbe. The building is pretty much deserted, but the Rebbe's sarcophagus-like grave marker is draped with the forms of several men, obscuring its form. Sunset on Tuesday brings an end to the holiday, but the singing continues. It may seem silly to some, but I decide to go home and get some rest.

September 23.

The holiday ended last night, and Uman in the darkness developed a strange carnival-like atmosphere. The Ukrainians convene impromptu tag sales on their lawns, selling toy guns to the Hasidic boys and fur hats to the adults.

I purchase two rabbit-fur shapkes for \$20, doing my part to support the Ukrainian economy. While the woman who I bought the hats from was pleasant enough, I do sense an almost palpable spirit in the Ukrainians. On the one hand, they realize these are the last few hours where they can get some money from us, so there's a fair amount of desperation. On the other hand, you can tell they are happy to see us go.

"This is special holiday, Olga! Tonight is night we celebrate the Jews leaving!"

Our temporary shtetl is packing up. For nearly a week it was as it might have been a hundred years ago around here, minus the Cossacks. But now we say L'Shahah Toiveh, To a Sweet New Year, and part company. What will they do in the big synagogue, once it is completed, during the year? It will have all these special rooms for meetings and classes: I saw maybe three people who were obviously local Jews.

I have long talks with two of my roommates. First, I talk with the 13-year-old boy. He explains some basics about Breslov, and we talk a while about his hat and the toy guns he bought here. He talks a little about his father and the house he lives in at home. Hours later I wake up to find another roommate having an allergy attack. I talk him through it, suggesting he drink cold water, but he refuses my offer of an over-the-counter remedy because he's not sure of its kosher status. We have a detailed conversation about Hepa filters, which he's never heard of.

We have a long talk about my plans to convert, and a surprisingly candid discussion of the current acrimony between some in the liberal and Orthodox branches of Judaism. It's clear I won't change his mind about how he feels about non-Orthodox Judaism, but I feel I accomplish something when I explain a couple of things I know about the other movements, which he is clearly ignorant of. I feel he has this idea that Reform Jews would celebrate Yom Kippur by holding a taffy pull, and I'm able to impress on him, I think, that we all have in common more than one might think.

Today, I have made the journey back. My last souvenir of Ukraine is a bottle of vodka. I only realize later, why are you going to drink Ukrainian vodka, while you spent the whole trip avoiding the probably radioactive water?

It takes about 24 hours, and I catch a miserable cold on the plane

back. This time around, I take considerable joy in watching the Hasidim make life a living hell for the German stewardesses. They won't stay in their seats, they bicker about the kosher standards of the meal, and they have the effrontery to daven.

I'm sitting in the JFK terminal, dressed in black jeans and a black denim shirt, in what passes for my own Hasidic garb. Add the fur hat, and you have a real picture. I wait to team up with my original traveling companion, who was never once worried about missing a bus or a plane. But then he's done this about seven times. I sit on my bag in a daze, feeling like I came back with an extra person inside me, and I stare at the Americans. After a week in the Ukraine with 7,000 Hasidim, all the American women I see look like they're dressed to be turning tricks in Tijuana. I run into one of the fellows from my original van ride from Sturbridge. We shake hands vigorously, warmly.

"Did you get a name?" he asks.

"Not yet," I say. These things are gradual, you know, I say to myself.

I don't tell him that I've been considering the name Yithro, the name of Moses' father-in-law, a famous convert. I like him because he told Moses that Moses couldn't make all these decisions for the people by himself, and that he would have to delegate authority. I also feel some kinship because Yithro has a sort of confused identity. At one point in the Torah, he disappears, and comes back with a different name.

But I mostly like Yithro because the English version of the name, Jethro, was the name of my favorite character on *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

Glossary

daven - to pray.

frum - religious, observant.

kippah - head covering, yarmulke.

meshuggeh - crazy.

minyan (pl. minyanim) - prayer groups, made up of the required quorum of ten Jewish men.

payess - the long sidecurls worn by traditional Hasidim.

shul - synagogue.

tallis - shawl worn during morning prayers.

tefillin - ritual object made of leather straps and two small boxes containing scripture, worn wrapped around the head and the left arm, worn for morning prayers.

tzaddik (pl. tzaddikim) - a righteous or holy person.

zedakah - charity.

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THE CASINO AS TEMPLE

BY MICHAEL SCHERER



On Columbus Day weekend all the slots were taken.

Each on his own stool, communing with her own machine, bar, double-bar and cherry, thousands of people pushed the buttons, pulled the levers, filled and emptied their cups of clinking coins, ashed their cigarettes, adjusted their oxygen tanks. Beeps, bongs, dings, flashing lights, and faint top-forty music. Somewhere near the center of the room, not that anyone could ever find the center, a hatchback on a stand, freshly waxed, waited to be won.

The table games, from blackjack to pai gow, took place in another room. Upon entering, players passed a sign which informed them that they were consenting to be photographed for promotional purposes. Given the panoptic eye of the hundreds of cameras already trained on every movement, each sullen, automatic motion of the table and slot players, the word consent looked prophetic. The whole place swooned with the aesthetics of worship. Thousands of individuals praying alone, in rows or around tables, for the intervention of something beyond their control, something which could fill an insatiable hole.

Here I defer to the definition of "religion" in my *Funk and Wagnalls College Standard Dictionary*, "A belief binding the spiritual nature of man to a supernatural being, as involving a feeling of dependence and responsibility, together with the feelings and practices which naturally flow from such a belief." Substitute "21 and over" for "man" and "\$" for "supernatural being" and you have a working definition for modern casino gambling, let alone the market economy.

Hunter S. Thompson knew this in the early '70s when he fumbled towards the electric oasis Vegas to find "the American Dream," his head chemically tuned to all manner of psychic wavelengths. People like Harvard theologian Harvey Cox —recently quoted in *The Nation* (10/26/98) as saying, "The Market may be the world's most powerful and fastest-growing religion today" —are quickly catching up. Like many other religions, "\$" demands faith, promises rewards and very often misses the point. In the modern casino, as the French theorists have told us, money becomes its own commodity, an end in itself, and then an abstraction: silver coins and colored chips whose appearance and disappearance represent emotion more than any sort of purchasing power.

If you've gambled, you know the intoxication. If you've gambled in a casino, you know that at some point time ceases to matter, the exits disappear and all your psychic powers focus on a single goal: winning. In the real world, the prosperity of most countries rides on the betting of a select clergy of money magnates. One of the clergy's many PR rags, *Forbes* magazine (10/14/96), explains away the obscene greed of America's 400 richest people, all of whom have more houses and planes than they could ever use, by writing, "Most stay in the game for the adrenaline rush, the joy of risking and winning." Here lies the genius of the casino: the market becomes an amusement park, economic ideologies are crystallized and neatly packaged for thrill. Casinos are the masses' neighborhood churches, paying homage to the virtual Vaticans of New York, Frankfurt and Tokyo. And unlike the rigid membership rules of the holy sanctums, at the casino everyone from burger-flippers to bankers can play.

Locating myself somewhere on that spectrum, I looked for a \$5

blackjack table to join in the fun.

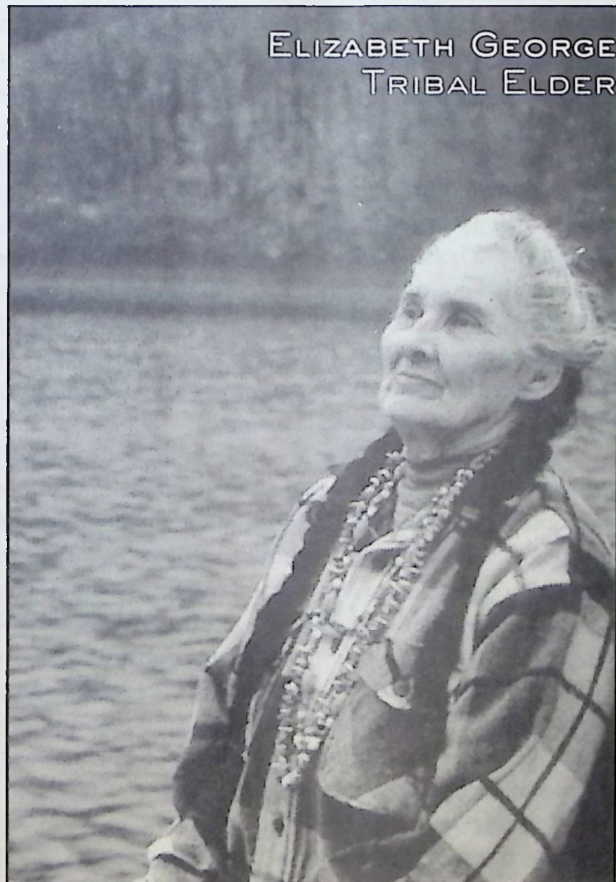
"You won't find anything under \$10," a dealer told me from behind a roulette wheel with a \$25 minimum, "it's a holiday weekend." Columbus Day weekend, I reminded myself.

Columbus matters because this was Foxwoods, the largest casino in the world, with some 50,000 visitors a day and a gross take of \$1 billion annually, owned and operated by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation. Irony abounds.

According to the *Encyclopedia of Gambling*, card playing was a favorite pastime of Columbus' crew on their first voyage. Somewhere on the Atlantic, the crew took a vow against gambling and destroyed their decks. When they reached the New World, however, they promptly fashioned new ones from cut leaves to continue their games, which they supposedly played when they weren't raping, murdering, or enslaving the Taino tribe of Hispaniola. Racism aside, the motivation for Columbus' abuses had everything to do with the games his men played off duty. The Spanish Monarchy, as everyone remembers from third grade, had gambled a considerable amount of money, ships and supplies on Columbus. Without the promised Asian gold and spices, Columbus brought back slaves, opening up the door for centuries of European manifest destined profiteers to decimate the native populations of America, mostly in the name of capital growth.

For their own part, Native Americans had been gambling centuries before Columbus slid out the womb. And like their European counterparts, native games of chance had been symbolic, religious rites, which affirmed tribal values. In 1902 Stewart Culin, writing for the US Bureau of American Ethnology, noted that gambling rituals among Native Americans "are performed...as religious ceremonies, as rites pleasing to the gods to secure their favor, or as processes of sympathetic magic..."

Instead of individual competition and greed, traditional Native American games of chance emphasized personal sacrifice, group competition and generosity. The



Flash back to early 17th century when the Algonquian-speaking Pequot (the name is derived from Pekawatawog, "the destroyers") were one of the most feared tribes in New England by the European newcomers. Prior to European contact the Pequots numbered about 8,000, spreading out over 15 villages in Southwestern Connecticut. By the 1630s, after a serious small pox epidemic, skirmishes between the Pequot and the English newcomers erupted into war. In the first conflict of its kind, the English with their native allies ambushed a Pequot village called Mystic Fort, killing about 600.

By the end of the Pequot war about 1,400 members of the tribe were killed or enslaved. The survivors were forbidden from returning to their villages or using their tribal name. Two centuries later Melville wrote in *Moby Dick*, "Pequod, you will no doubt remember, was the name of a celebrated tribe of Massachusetts Indians, now extinct as the ancient Medes." But he was wrong: CT not MA, and they weren't extinct, only dwindling. By 1935 the population of the Pequot reservation amounted to 42. By the mid '70s only two women with Pequot blood remained on the land.

Thanks to the organizing of Richard (Skip) Hayward, elected tribal chairman in 1975, the tribes fortunes soon shifted. Despite a veto by President Reagan, the federal government formally recognized the Pequot tribe and established its federal land claim in 1983. By 1992 more than 400 Pequot descendants had returned to the reservation, and Foxwoods was opened, about 2 1/2 hours away from 10% of the US population.

The whole complex, which rises like a cathedral on loan from Disney, has 4.1 million square feet, 310,000 square feet of gaming space, some 5,750 slot machines, 370 table games, a 3,000 seat bingo room, a racebook room with 50-foot high projection screens, 1,421 hotel rooms, 15,000 parking spaces, and about 11,500 employees.

In order to appease political critics, 25% of the slot take goes to the state of Connecticut in taxes. As of February 1997, the state had received more than half a billion dollars in taxes.

Haudenosaunee Iroquois have a peach stone game, called Gus-ká-eh, which is considered one of the four divine amusements made by the creator for the happiness of his people. According to Paul Pasquaretta, in his Ph.D. dissertation "Tricksters at Large," when people play Gus-ká-eh "winning is less important than the attitude a player brings to the game. Playing with the right attitude means staking one's most valuable possessions on the outcome of the contest and playing for the good of the whole community..." Not quite Wall Street, but then native tribes weren't looking to accumulate tremendous wealth "for the adrenaline rush."

The gambling at Foxwoods, in fact, has nothing to do with native tradition. Except for the Pocahontas style skirts on the barmaids, the Wampum cards connecting zombie players to their machines (a frequent player perk named somewhat disingenuously after the sacred belts used in religious ceremonies by Algonquian and Iroquois tribes), and

On the other side of the

world, Yasir Arafat has opened a mirrored casino called the "Oasis." Located in the West Bank town of Jericho, the windowless building, bordering the refugee camps, caters to an exclusively Israeli clientele. Palestinians wanting to gamble will be turned away at the door. Most Palestinians, as practicing Muslims, don't gamble anyway.

So why build it? Because they will come, and 25-30% of the take will go to the Palestinian Authority. Without a doubt, the whole project seems high risk given the unsteady peace which exists between the two peoples. But maybe Arafat's betting on the lessons of Foxwoods —there just might be a better way to continue old wars.

the tacky, narrated light show which illuminates a 12-foot tall translucent plastic Pequot, Foxwoods is just another obnoxious casino.

As a spectacle, however, it would be a mistake to consider Foxwoods outside the history of Native American oppression (see side-bar previous page). In many ways the scene on Columbus Day weekend —thousands of European descendants, myself included, forking over crisp pictures of Franklin, Grant and Jackson to a tribe once massacred by European hubris— seemed like sweet revenge. History inverts itself; the headline reads: Native American tribe now exploiting Europeans' beliefs to their own ends. If Nike can recruit William Burroughs for its ads (the same Burroughs that said, "watch whose money you pick up") and Disney-via-ABC can sell TV shows by pointing out to their viewers how pathetic their lives are, why can't tribes achieve self-sufficiency by embracing the heart of the beast which tried for so many years to destroy them?

With the money it has made, the tribe has already built a \$193 million Museum and Research Center —absent the flashing lights, the beeps, the bongs and the dings. If you head to Foxwoods, whatever your motivation, it's worth visiting (if you go for the research, call ahead to avoid the \$10 entrance fee). From the outside the place looks like a space station— all concrete, glass and steel: sharp landscaping, a giant dome and a 185-foot tall tower. Inside the plastic simulations of pre-contact Pequots fishing, weaving, hunting and sleeping are enough to make Walt Disney sweat in his cryogenic tank.

Over the weekend while the masses gambled nearby, the museum told me some 3,500 people opted for a few hours of history. For all those people, Hollywood's Cowboy 'n Indian narrative was upstaged by an equally glamorous, more accurate survival story. At the Research Center, the wing of the building where I gathered much of the material for this article, thousands of volumes on American and Canadian Native histories, reference help, photocopying and computer access are available free to the public. For perhaps the first time, Native Americans have a direct, large scale economic hand in the creation of the knowledge surrounding Native American issues.

On the other hand, reservation gambling does have a darker side. In the casino, the Pequot tribe has sanctioned a money-driven Vegas version of itself— skirts, Wampum cards, and light shows— which only reinforces the negative stereotypes. Many Native Americans argue that Indian gaming is only the natural result of the tribal system imposed upon indigenous peoples by the federal government to facilitate the erosion of traditional governing structures. In California, Proposition 5, which sought to expand the Indian Gaming industry, drew criticism from the AFL-CIO and the United Farm Workers, because reservations are exempt from environmental and worker health and safety laws. When I called the Pequot Tribal Nation's PR department, they happily answered my questions about attendance and the number of slot machines, but deferred my questions about unions to "someone who could answer that question," who "isn't available right now" and never returned my call. There is some wisdom in what Burroughs said, and it remains to be seen what the tribe will do with the rest of its fabulous, new wealth.

The fiercest and most transparent condemnations of Foxwoods, however, comes from the priests who usually preside over the worship themselves. Religious appropriation can draw some pretty nasty fire. Donald Trump (net worth: \$1.5 billion), who recently wrote a third, self-congratulatory

ry autobiography, testified before Congress in 1993 that the Indian gaming industry was riddled with organized crime, though he failed to provide any evidence. He said that Foxwoods' kind "would be the economic death knell to Atlantic City." Five years later, no knells have sounded for Trump or his two Atlantic City casinos.

Good-old-*Forbes Magazine* chimed in its own opinion with an article on the heresy called "The new buffalo —but who got the meat (sic)" (9/8/97). In it author William G. Flanagan writes that Indian gaming was a "softheaded idea from the start," and that Congress approved of it with the hopes of appeasing "a poor and politically embarrassing minority and their liberal allies" — but don't worry, *Forbes* reserves somewhat gentler adjectives for Mr. Trump. The brunt of Flanagan's argument, that Pequot affluence should somehow be held responsible for the extreme poverty that continues to exist on the Navajo reservation thousands of miles away, stinks of the same simplistic bigotry that blames single mothers for poverty and inner-city children for low test scores. I'd bet a few chips that "The new buffalo" was the first time *Forbes* ever waxed sympathetic over Navajo poverty.

As the world's economy teeters on the edge of a precipice created by our blind faith in the "best and brightest" free-market mavericks — the ones who beg for (and get) government intervention only when their own bets don't pay out— a reformation might be in order. Until then, attendance will most likely continue to increase at places like Foxwoods, and tribes across the country will continue to realize economic self-sufficiency in this most bizarre of manners.

Arguments about reservation gaming also promise to intensify as the stakes get higher. It will be interesting to see how the debate plays itself out. In a culture where money shapes the values which shift public opinion, for the first time ever some Native American tribes can be major players.

As for me, I went down \$30 (at the \$10 tables) only to win back enough for gas money home. I watched some people lose hundreds, but they still seemed to be enjoying themselves, the steady stream of free alcohol, the comfort of consenting, and the apparent depths of their pockets.

After all, what's a few hundred bucks for a chance to communicate with the almighty?



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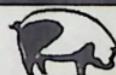
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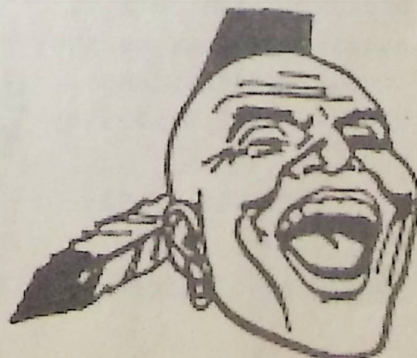


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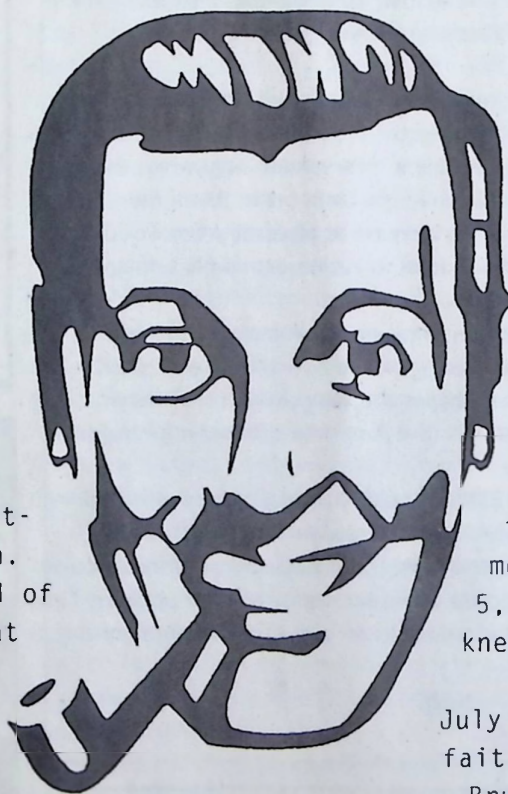
Preachers of all denominations like to remind us that it's all a matter of faith.

On April 3, 1843, self-proclaimed prophet William Miller urged his followers throughout New England to gather on hilltops to witness the Armageddon. Nothing happened. Miller then decided his interpretations of the Bible were incorrect and set a date for July 7, 1843. Still nothing. Then the last day of this world was declared for March 21, 1844. Again, nothing happened.

On Oct. 22, 1844, 100,000 "Millerites" waited to ascend into heaven. Since we're here to read of this today, you know what happened: nothing. Although many of his followers were disillusioned, William Miller continued preaching and selling ascension robes to the true believers, and died in 1849 a wealthy man.

In the past few years, we've seen Jimmy Swaggart

THE END OF THE WORLD IS A BUST!



**MEMBERS OF THE
CHURCH OF THE
SUBGENIUS GATHERED
TO LEAVE EARTH AND
WERE LEFT WAITING
AT THE STATION
BY G. MICHAEL
DOBBS**

crying to his congregation about his marital indiscretions, to Oral Roberts relating how a vision of a giant Jesus appeared before him in the desert. It's still a matter of faith, and Miller would be right at home.

He would be especially comfortable around the members of the Church of the SubGenius and undoubtedly sympathetic to what their head prophet is experiencing. You see, the Rev. Ivan Stang has been preaching the word of J.R. "Bob" Dobbs since 1979 and the cornerstone of his message was that on July 5, 1998 the world as we knew it was going to end.

And on this past July 5th, hundreds of the faithful gathered at Brushwood Folklore Center in Sherman, New York, for one last weekend filled with earthly pleasures before the Xists - mysterious aliens from another world - would save them and destroy the rest of humanity.

While they were waiting, they apparently had a great time (check out the reports on the official SubGenius website: www.subgenius.com), but the spaceships never did come.

When the aliens didn't come to pick the SubGeni up, the crowd turned on Stang. They actually tarred and feathered him. Well, maybe not tarred him, but Stang was stripped naked in front of the disappointed crowd, had pink feathers glued to his body, and tossed into a pool. Women of the Church then publicly belittled his manliness.

Just what kind of religion would involve salvation through space aliens?

Well, take equal parts of Dale Carnegie self-improvement tracts, red-neck worship of Elvis Presley, unquestioning belief in Bigfoot and UFOs, bizarre fetishes revolving around the head of a famous golfer, a fascination with the marketing abilities of fundamentalist preachers, an unshakable conviction that dark powers are trying to make everyone into sheep-like dupes, and a pride in celebrating the odd and abnormal, and you have the basis for the Church of the SubGenius.

It's a faith which can be augmented, invented, and edited on the spot by its believers; a faith that has attracted people such as author Robert Anton Wilson and cartoonist Robert Crumb; and a faith that has been covered by numerous magazine, newspaper, and television stories. Stang has authored and edited three mainstream books on the Church, pro-

duced videos, and has hosted a long-running radio show.

"Bob's" message first manifested itself in 1979 with the publication of an amazing pamphlet. "The World Ends Tomorrow and YOU MAY DIE," the headline screamed. A list of provocative questions followed: "Are We Controlled by Secret Forces? Are Alien Space Monsters Bringing a Startling New World? Do People Think You're Strange? Do You?"

The publication revealed the word of one J.R. "Bob" Dobbs, a self-described super-salesman who discovered back in the Fifties that a group of aliens were intent on destroying this planet and taking its people into hideous sexual bondage. "Bob" made a deal with the aliens, though, to spare those who are truly abnormal, the group of people he dubbed the "SubGenius."

While the cosmic clock was ticking away towards the day of reckoning, the dark forces of normalcy, The Conspiracy (no other name or description is needed), continued to lull most of us into a complacent condition. They fill our mind with useless information and give us goals which channel our energies away from the activities which could literally save our world.

Photos of the elusive "Bob" show an empty-eyed idiot clenching a pipe in his grinning mouth and looking like a warped clone of Ward Cleaver. However, "Bob" had an understanding of the world few men possessed, and his main message was one of

"Slack." With Slack, the plans of the Conspiracy become evident and salvation is possible. Without it, you're nothing more than a "Normal," a "Pink Boy," a two-legged sheep eagerly doing their bidding and just making time before the Xists take charge.

Explaining "Slack" is like describing air. "Bob" tells us we



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are all born with natural Slack, but the Conspiracy wants to take it away.

Those who have it may be unaware of their state of grace and those who need it may never be able to regain the Slack they had at the date of their birth. Interestingly enough, the first step in achieving Slack is

mailing off \$30.00 to join the Church, but you can't claim that on your income tax. The Church of the SubGenius declares itself proudly as the "First Industrial Church," and pays its' taxes gladly. The \$30.00 "donation" sets you up with a starter kit of Church propaganda including a subscription to the *Stark Fist of Removal*, the Church's newsletter, and a certificate proclaiming your new degree of Doktorate of Forbidden Sciences.

The Conspiracy's reaction to the Church has been insidious and effective. It has labeled the Church as mere "humor" and "parody." You won't find Stang's *The Book of the SubGenius* in the "religion" aisle of Barnes and Noble where it should be. The Conspiracy sticks it over in humor next to all the "You Must be a Redneck..." books.

You see, in the Church of the SubGenius the only acknowledged sin is to say it's all a "joke."

By all accounts, the days leading up to July 5th were a complete success. Hundreds of abnormals camped at the rural New York site and participated in the sacraments of sex, drugs, and rock and roll. When the Xists failed to make their appearance, though, the cosmic fertilizer hit the ventilation system. "Bob" didn't deliver, and Stang, the visible leader of the Church, was screwed. Besides Stang's public humiliation, some disgruntled SubGeniuses grumbled about a class action suit against Stang and the Church.

Stang, though, has regained his composure and his belief in "Bob" is

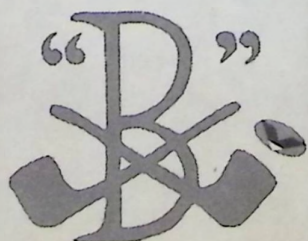
apparently stronger than ever.

His posted tirade on the SubGenius website, though, casts a gauntlet to the faithful: "Did the JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES quit coming to YOUR DOOR just because their End of the World happened to have fizzled out 6 or 7 times in a row? FUCK no. Did Teacher Chen and God's Salvation Church give up just because God wasn't on TV on March 17th? HELL NO! They just moved out of Dallas... As difficult as it is to believe that a PREACHER like J.R."BOB" DOBBS might LIE or FUCK UP, BY GOBBS, MY FAITH THAT HE CAN REMAINS AS HARD AS A ROCK!!"


Stang views the alien no-show as a test of the faithful. Those who want to cast "Bob" aside may do so at the risk of one day the Xists actually coming by to enslave mankind.

So, Stang and his followers await to hear when the re-calculated date will be and they will continue fighting the good fight for slack. As "Bob" so frequently says, "Fuck'em if they can't take a joke." If he were here today, William Miller would certainly be in on the gag.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Yes, my last name is actually "Dobbs," and no, "Bob" is no kin of mine....at least not that my family will admit to, but I do pursue the path of Slack and have for over ten years. And I URGE YOU in the name of "BOB" to send the Church a single dollar bill to receive the pamphlet that COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE! The sacred address is PO Box 140306, Dallas, TX 75214.



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By 1934, hundreds of the castoffs were scattered under the rolling green knolls, in unmarked graves on the hospital grounds, where they still reside. The patient's deaths were recorded only as balance sheet items; the state reimbursed the hospital \$10 for each patient buried on hospital grounds.

by David Biederman



In September, 1993, Northampton State Hospital closed its doors for good, and the patients were kicked out of the institution instead of herded into it. A Massachusetts House Committee, chaired by then-Northampton Representative William Nagle, charged the Weld administration, in its haste to privatize the state hospital system, discharged patients into for-profit facilities with "critical and serious safety problems."

The same committee later charged that 35 psychiatric patients were discharged directly to the streets or homeless shelters. "What a cruel hoax we have here," Nagle said at the time.

Today, the patients are gone but the mean and divisive politics of NSH remain. With Northampton suffering ongoing losses of living wage jobs, the need for business development and jobs creation at the soon-to-be-developed site is critical for the city; the NSH Citizens Advisory Committee has set a goal of 750 "decent, well-paying jobs" for NSH-based businesses. But the chances of that goal being met appear to be slim to none; most of the site will be dedicated to low-income and market-rate housing.

The second era of the 140 year-old institution began in August, when the four-member NSH selection committee — a group that includes Northampton Mayor Mary Ford and City Council president Mary Clare Higgins — chose a development team for the site. The team is headed by The Community Builders Inc. of Boston, a non-profit real estate company that builds affordable housing.

Preliminary plans call for up to 200 ownership and rental units of affordable and market-rate housing. Gerry Joseph, Community Builder's project manager for NSH, said that 400,000 square feet of commercial/light industrial space could be built out over time to help meet the city's jobs-creation goal. Some of the existing buildings will be preserved and sold, along with vacant commercial sites, to private developers. Up to 140 acres of the 538-acre parcel will be developed; the rest of the site will set aside as open space or for municipal uses such as a school. Community Builders expects to have a master plan for the site within six months; the plan is subject to approval from the state's Office of Capital Asset Management.

Mayor Ford once referred to NSH as "virtually the opportunity of a century to shape the growth of Northampton." Indeed it is, but it is an opportunity that is being squandered; very little if any growth will be generated at NSH under the current plan. To its credit, Northampton has an

admirable track record in providing and maintaining affordable housing. But rather than addressing the underlying causes of the city's growing housing crisis — the loss of living wage jobs that is pricing many residents out of the housing market — city leaders are passing the buck to Community Builders; the developer has been saddled with the momentous task of creating jobs when all it really knows how to do is build housing. City leaders, meanwhile, have their heads back comfortably under the sand where they don't have to face Northampton's dirty secret; in spite of years of boosterism that would make George Babbitt blush, the city is in a downward economic spiral from which it cannot extricate itself and which it cannot even acknowledge or face.

There are those who question whether the property should be developed at all. "This land was set aside for the public," said Robert Merkin, a former manager of the Emergency Cot Shelter Program in Northampton. "Why this has to go into the development sector I do not understand."

Merkin's question is fair but irrelevant at a time when the city is faced with Proposition 2 1/2 spending constraints, mounting losses of living wage jobs and an exploding homeless population. More than the development itself, what disturbs many people in the city is the absence of any real urgency in the so-called public dialogue. Instead, the project is getting the same sort of boosterism from the usual suspects — City Hall, the Chamber of Commerce, the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* — as did the ill-fated Hotel Northampton and the gang of thieves that brought it down.

Northampton is a place where residents and politicians alike profess an almost mystical belief in the city's success. The idyll of Northampton is one of prosperity and progressive politics, an arts Mecca with lots of great restaurants. The moniker "Paris of New England" has been bantered around only slightly tongue-in-cheek, and indeed, on a crisp autumn evening, strolling the wide boulevard and watching the colorful crowds, one could get the impression that the dire poverty of Holyoke and Springfield is just a distant rumor.

It isn't. Among Massachusetts communities, the Valley's two biggest cities rank near the bottom in school quality, the number of people living in poverty and just about every other indicator of urban blight. Northampton isn't there yet but is headed in that direction; the city is a victim both of what the organization Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities described as a trillion dollar disinvestment

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by government in communities, and of its own inept leadership.

The housing crisis that is creeping northward is a severe one. It was only a year ago that the Hampden Hampshire Housing Partnership announced it would be opening its waiting list for "Section 8" government housing subsidies for the first time since 1993. Around 300 of the coveted subsidies were available.

Close to 14,000 applicants showed up, more than triple the number who applied in 1993. Many camped out overnight. Over 89% of the applicants were from Hampden and Hampshire counties, and the applicant pool included many single, middle-aged persons who had only recently been self-sufficient. The agency was so overwhelmed that it closed the waiting list after 72 hours. For many of those on the list, housing assistance is years away.

Northampton is headed in that direction because fewer and fewer residents are able to earn a living wage, largely because of a cataclysmic shift in the region from a manufacturing to a service economy. Over the past quarter century Western Massachusetts has lost over 27,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs, which have been replaced by an almost equal number of low-paying service jobs.

Those job holders are the people that Robert Merkin said fill the beds of the city's homeless shelters; typically, he said, they work one or two jobs, but it's easy to see why that might not pay the bills. Service sector jobs, which account for 41% of the city's total employment, average \$21,872 in annual wages. Trade jobs, which account for almost 25% of the city's total job base, pay on average \$12,684 per year; those figures are, respectively, 28% and 45% below the already-low regional annual average of \$27,487. By comparison, in 1991, regional manufacturing jobs paid average annual salaries of \$30,094.

Between 1993 and 1996, both service and trade jobs increased as a percentage of the city's jobs total, while manufacturing and government jobs declined.

"As our economy continues to stratify wages we continue to see a growth in the number of people who are at the bottom edge of the wage scale," said Jonathan Hite, executive director of the Northampton Housing Authority. "Young families and people who work in service industries have a tremendously difficult time affording rents in the area. Families are bringing in uncles and cousins because the jobs they have won't allow them to pay rent."

There are also troubling signs at the higher end of the housing market. According to the Case-Shiller Home Price Index, repeat sales of existing homes, a key indicator of the health of the local housing market, have been flat for ten years; a home purchased in 1989 in Northampton has appreciated just a little over 5% between then and now. In contrast, homes in the western suburbs of Boston have gone up over 60% in value.

"Housing statistics are closely linked to the conditions of the local economy," said Chip Case, a professor of economics at Wellesley College and a visiting scholar at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. "The housing market nationally has been unbelievable amidst general economic optimism and a booming stock market. The relative slow growth in Northampton has led to slower appreciation in a period of rapid appreciation."

Northampton's school system is also in trouble. Schools are

like canaries in a coal mine; when they start to decline, the city can be expected to follow suit. As in other Bay State communities, Northampton schools are subject to the harsh constraints of Proposition 2 1/2. A study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston entitled "School Quality and Massachusetts Enrollment Shifts in the Context of Tax Limitations" found that budget constraints under Prop 2 1/2 have helped place Northampton's school system below the state's median quartile based on average test scores between 1988 and 1994. By comparison, towns in the Amherst regional system are ranked in the top quartile.

That bodes poorly for Northampton; the type of entrepreneurs that Northampton is hoping to attract do not normally move to communities where schools are in decline. The Federal study found that families in the Commonwealth tend to move to communities where school districts are less constrained by Proposition 2 1/2. The reverse is also true; families who have the means to do so "vote with their feet" and move out of communities that have reached their 2 1/2 levy limits, seeking cities and towns with greater capacities to support schools.

Northampton is not at its levy limit but is facing a tough override vote in November. The community at large, even those without school-age children, would be well-advised to pass the override; the Federal study found that, in communities found to be constrained by Proposition 2 1/2, gains in property values were realized only to the extent that they were able to get around 2 1/2 through overrides.

People are already "voting with their feet;" perhaps the most troubling sign for the region is the fact that over 35,000 people left Western Massachusetts between 1990 and 1995. That has contributed to a shrinkage in Northampton's workforce of 2% between 1993 and 1996; during that time period job growth in Northampton was just 0.4%, substantially below the Valley's regional jobs growth rate of 4%. Overall Northampton's population of around 30,000 is the same today as it was in 1970; during the same period the national population grew by 30% and the state's by 7%.

The population shift is partly a function of a phenomenon described by Alice Rarig, a demographer at the Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research, as "white flight." According to U.S. Census Bureau data, between 1980 and 1990 the Valley's white population decreased by 14,377 people; at the same time, the minority population

of the Valley increased by 35,424, a 60% increase. According to the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, that represents a shift of nearly 16% in the region's racial makeup.

Bruce MacDougall, the director of the Center for Rural Massachusetts and a regional planner at UMass, wrote that the region's relative low unemployment rates stem not from robust growth but from the exodus of people from the region. Had the population stayed the same between 1990 and 1995, the unemployment rate would be closer to 9.6%.

"The apparent economic health of the region is due largely to demographic changes rather than to a classic economic expansion," wrote MacDougall in Massachusetts Benchmarks.

Not surprisingly, projections for new growth in Northampton show a significant decline for fiscal year 1999. Estimated new growth is \$225,000, down from \$360,779 in fiscal 1998.

To escape the vice-grip of Proposition 2 1/2, Northampton has three options; it can expand the city's tax base through development, seek an override or split the tax rate.

The latter option would be political suicide for any mayor; one can easily imagine the city's merchants storming City Hall. Northampton has a single tax rate of \$14.58 for both commercial and residential taxpayers. That's a rarity among cities with commercial centers; single tax rates are generally found in rural suburbs and towns. A split tax rate would increase the town's tax base and spread more of the tax burden to businesses in the city, which now pay around 25% of the city's total tax revenues.

Massachusetts communities are moving in that direction. In 1995 alone, 104 cities and towns in the state went from a single to a split rate, shifting over \$564 million in tax burdens from homeowners to commercial taxpayers. Nearly one third of the 351 cities and towns in the state now have two-tiered tax structures.

The override option is also risky. Bay State communities have attempted 659 overrides since 1993 and were successful only 35% of the time. Mayor Ford has had mixed success with overrides; a \$1.28 million override was soundly defeated by voters in 1992 but two overrides, for schools and the new fire station, have since passed muster with voters. A new school override, which even opponents of prior overrides are supporting, comes before voters in November.

That leaves commercial development as the city's only real growth option, and the NSH plan

under Community Builders is the cornerstone of that strategy. But it is a shaky foundation; how can CB create jobs without a concerted regional approach, and what can be said about regional leadership that turns to quivering jelly when confronted with the question of a second bridge over the river, an obvious no-brainer in terms of future growth?

Gerry Joseph, project manager of NSH for Community Builders, acknowledged that the CB's experience with commercial development is limited. What the firm does do is build affordable housing. CB has developed over 10,000 units in five states but is hardly entrepreneurial. It feeds heavily at the subsidy trough, funding its many projects with \$750 million acquired from a complex universe of HUD Hope VI grants, Community Development Block Grants, rental assistance grants, foundation grants, Mass Housing Finance Authority grants, low income tax credits, Section 8 mobile housing

vouchers and other state and Federal sources.

The CB proposal feebly envisions three sources of jobs growth; Smith College, an expected influx of artists and art-related businesses and opportunities for Department of Mental Health clients to work at Smith or in arts-related businesses.

That growth scenario is fuzzy at best, and city leadership, feeling the heat, is losing a lot of sleep over it. Smith may not grow at all, and may instead cut back. "Art-related businesses" is an obtuse term that could mean anything or nothing, and DMH jobs are laudable but hardly well-paying. The fact is there does not appear to be any incentives for Community Builders to expand beyond its core competency and get into the risky business of commercial development.

The Northampton-Easthampton Economic Development Strategy report, released in June, outlines the business retention and economic develop-

ment strategies of both cities. The report acknowledges that it is "faster and more profitable to develop the site for housing," and recommends that the city consider securing an agreement with the developer to ensure that the portion of the NSH site set aside for commercial and industrial use be committed to those uses for at least twenty years.

The recommendation puts an exclamation point on the importance of NSH to Northampton's future growth; the study found that Northampton has no substantial vacant building space on the market and few available development sites. It cited NSH and the Northampton Business Park — which has yet to be built — as the primary opportunities to reach its goals.

For its part, Community Builders was issuing caveats on the jobs goal in the proposal stage of the process. Northampton is a small community, they warn in their initial proposal, and the jobs goal represents an increase of over 4% of the city's total employment base; the final plan "must be grounded in the realities of the marketplace;"



The advertisement features a row of ten small car icons at the top. Below them, the word "CERTIFIED" is in large, bold, white letters with a black outline. Underneath is "HONDA" in a similar style. Then "New & Used" in a smaller, white font. Below that is "SUPERSTORE" in large, bold, white letters with a black outline. At the bottom, there is a black box containing the text "Discover the Difference" in white, followed by "NORTHAMPTON HONDA" in large, bold, white letters. Below that is "171 KING ST., ROUTE 5, NORTHAMPTON" and "1-413-586-8626 * 1-800-369-7889". At the very bottom, the sales and service hours are listed in white text.

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the design concept must be tested against "financial reality;" assumptions must be "confirmed" and community objectives for the site, if not carefully considered, could become "competitive and contradictory."

Finally, CB allows that 750 new jobs over a 20-year period is possible, but the community will have to share responsibility for the feat. And what if the already nervous economy takes a turn for the worse? "If there is a recession how can you create 750 jobs," said Jonathan Hite of the NHA? "At that point our goal would be to reserve what we have."

"People at a distance have been more ignorant of our former imperfections, and have been ready to look upon Northampton as a kind of heaven on earth."

- Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards, one of America's preeminent religious philosophers, was minister of Northampton from 1727 until 1750. It was then that the austere Calvinist, who spoke alternately of religious ecstasy and suffering beyond redemption, was bitterly dismissed from his post; caught up in the cesspool of town politics, Edwards was banished in part because of his annoying habit of describing the sins of the town fathers before his assembled congregation.

Nothing much has changed in Northampton; mysticism still permeates the ether, not so much in the city's churches but in the Chamber of Commerce, the Planning Department and City Hall. Zealous and dogmatic, Northampton's leaders still speak of economic miracles when the grim demographic data is there for all to see. They giggle and blather over the town's fictitious prosperity much as Edward's congregants wept and convulsed with joy during the First Great Awakening in 1735, when a rash of religious conversions swept through the isolated and superstitious community of Northampton.

Mary Ford's embarrassing and silly sojourn to Hollywood in 1994, in an effort to attract a major film studio to the NSH site, sums up exactly which part of the human anatomy the city's head is up; Ford was appropriately laughed out of Tinseltown. The current administration has no experience in, and knows nothing about, jobs, growth or business retention.

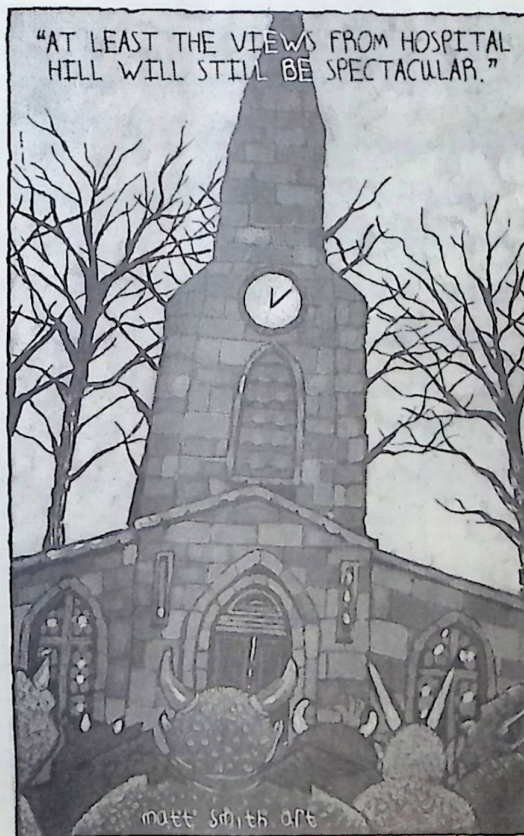
One expects mindless boosterism from the Chamber of Commerce, but the local media, the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* and the *Valley Advocate*, are nothing more than mouthpieces for the lame Chamber. Slavishly dependent on ad revenues from Northampton's merchants and inexplicably convinced that reality is bad for business, they devote much more ink to the Taste of Northampton than to the loss of living wage jobs. They trumpet the

restoration of the Calvin Theatre like Jed Clampett toasting an oil strike when there is no evidence that the theatre, pretty as it is, will do anything for the city other than cannibalize off of other entertainment venues.

The local George Babbitts are fiddling while Noho slides back to its pre-1978 status as a sleepy backwater of no consequence. Northampton resembles nothing so much as a food court without a roof; other than pulling cappuccino, where are the job prospects? The city has no anchor industries, no backbone, no prospects for long term growth.

The NSH project is high noon for Northampton. If the city hopes to attract the types of businesses that it claims to be wooing — software firms, new media, film and art related companies — NSH will have to

play a central role in any sort of enticement. There is truth to the assertion that there is a natural fit between the city and those types of businesses. But in a city where real public dialogue is treated as heresy, where the inmates are literally running the asylum, it appears that little if any growth will come of NSH. At least the views from Hospital Hill will still be spectacular.



POETRY

AREA 59

THIS ABANDONED CHURCH
WAS A GOOD OUTPOST

TO SPEND THE NIGHT
I TOLD HER

BECAUSE IT WAS
ONCE SANCTIFIED

AND HAD EXPERIENCED SOME
OF LIFE'S CHANGES

WE WERE ON OUR OWN WAY
TO LAS VEGAS

TO GET A DIVORCE
AND I JUST WANTED

ONE LAST MEMORY
FOR OLD TIME'S SAKE

THE CHURCH WAS
NONDENOMINATIONAL

AND THE CARETAKER
VERY HAPPY TO SEE US

HE GAVE US
HIS UNOFFICIAL BLESSING

AND WE
SLEPT AMONG THE PEWS

WHILE HIS WIFE
SERENADED US

WITH LONELY COWBOY TUNES
ON THE PUMP ORGAN

THERE ARE, THEY SAY,
MANY MIRAGES JUST LIKE THIS

ALL OVER THE STATE
OF NEVADA EVER SINCE

THE ATOMIC BOMB TESTING—
IT MUST JUST BE

THE SPECIES LOOKING OUT
FOR ITSELF, I THINK

- ROBERT LORD KEYES

TOUCHES THE WORLD

No Christ giving sight
To the blind.
No rainbow, no relic, no heart.

I lift bread to my mouth.
This, the body of man
Grown in the fields.
This, the harvest of gold
Turning towards the sun.
I cannot eat this
Without remembering you.

And yet, separate now
From those twilight hours
Spent with you,
I forgive myself
For trusting,
For jumping blindly
Into nothing.

And the heart touches the soul
Touches the eyes touches the world
That is suddenly only a room
With a naked light bulb.

- Corrine De Winter

IN GOD'S COUNTRY PET SHOP

My father searches
for the Word
as if there really were answers
to puzzles
answers that fit
in such small spaces
Wet light
pours down from mountain tops
and finds him
amidst his inventoried life
Working at a trust
he flushes dead years away
and cleans his cages
He still believes
the shiny coin
"In God ..."

- Caleb
Brooks



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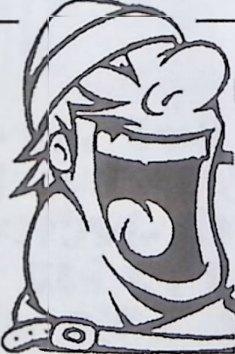
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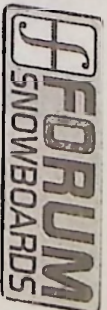


Chelsea Royal Diner



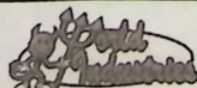
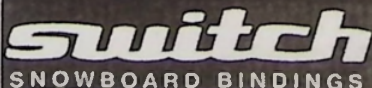
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WARE RIVER CLUB



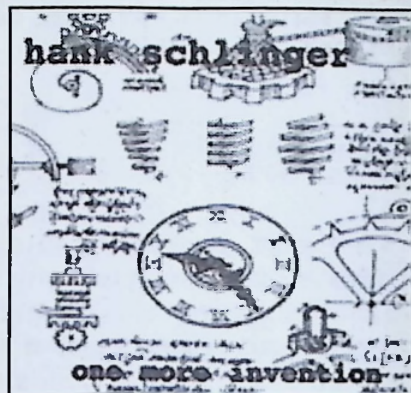
WARE RIVER CLUB THE BAD SIDE OF OTIS AVE. Natural Disaster

Local cooperative Natural Disaster hits the stores with their first release, and it's a beauty. Ware River Club is a local supergroup of sorts, bringing together Matt Cullen, Matt Hebert, Bob Hennessey, Keith Levreault and Ray Mason... all of whom seem to be playing for at least two other bands at any given moment. Like Voltron, when combined they form an unstoppable force which is greater than the sum of its parts. There's a strong founda-

tion of country music, but like the Byrds, this outfit is something more than country. Strong licks and strong lyrics serve to make this group one to check out. Certainly one of the most enjoyable elements of the record is Hebert's lead vocals on many of the cuts. Who knew that this guy, who has appeared in the background of so many bands, had such a great whiskey-soaked voice? I'm especially fond of "4,000 Pound Dog," "50 Years of Smoking" and "Green Thumb," although "Akron" is also quite enjoyable. See these guys before they decide to do something else.

(Natural Disaster, POB 254, Haydenville, MA 01039 / www.natural-disaster.com)

- Phil Straub



HANK SCHLINGER ONE MORE INVENTION Hank Schlinger Records

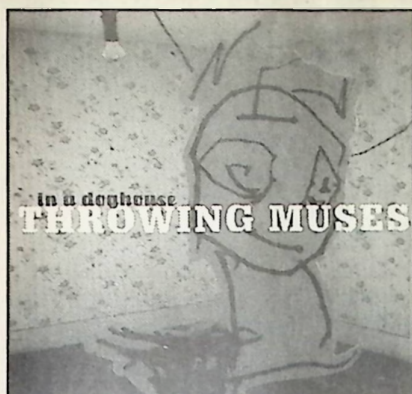
Here's a nice catchy CD from yet another Valley artist, Hank Schlinger. Overall, it has a jangly, sixties sound and interesting, serious lyrics. At times it's almost Beatlesque.

"It's Only Love" is a straightforward rocker with some muscular guitar work and tasteful soloing. Hank is joined here by co-producer Brian Fellows on bass, drums and percussion (Schlinger plays all the rest and sings). All the songs are great, really. But I especially like "Come With Me," an almost Trafficish number. There's quite a bit of variety, but none I would call mellow. The title cut's a particularly strong effort, but I could easily hear each and every one of them on the radio. Great guitar sounds are everywhere, as is Hank's folksy harmonica. His voice is also better than most of today's sound-alike "alternatives" and he harmonizes with himself quite well. The arrangements are all tight and energetic and the songs all seem to have a message or story to them.

My only advice at this point is to seek out the help of a good graphic artist. The rest of the disc is just fine without anyone's advice.

(Contact: 42 Smithfield Court, Springfield, MA 01103 / hschling@wnec.edu)

- Meathook Williams



THROWING MUSES IN A DOGHOUSE Ryco

1985 in Boston was a weird time for bands. Punk had petered out, Burma was gone, hardcore was just starting to gel at the Channel and art rock had all but disappeared. Once in a while my friends and I would run across a band that was really hard to pin down. One band that really stood out was the Throwing Muses. Like the Boston art-punk trio Christmas, the Muses were girl-led and quirky. Multiple shows at Jack's in Cambridge (burned down in 1986) quickly drew a loyal following. Kristin Hersh's 'little girl teetering on the edge of madness' act (perhaps not an act...) was the perfect counterpoint to Tanya Donnelly's beach-blond flip. The rhythm section of tall dreadlocked Leslie Langston on bass and sole male member David Narcizo on drums provided an equally quirky backdrop (Narcizo didn't use cymbals in his kit).

Their strong live set was centered around the **Doghouse** cassette — their only release at that time. They had captured their quiet menace of stage aura that made them so appealing. The essence of their shows was preserved nicely onto tape, not an easy feat for a cassette release. It didn't come as any surprise when their debut LP (1986) contained seven of **Doghouse's** ten

songs. Not quite as amphetamine charged as the tape, their debut LP polished the songs, sanitized some of Hersh's more insane vocal tremolos and dive bomb snarls, and concentrated on a slightly prettier sound. This did not conceal any of the original edginess, though. The torment (and self-torment) of "Call Me," "Hate My Way" and "Rabbit is Dying" showed a different kind of woman in rock. Kristin Hersh sang of things best friends would feel uncomfortable discussing. The growls of desperation she delivers on "Hate My Way" are gripping in their authenticity, mustering an intensity lacking in most of today's female angststers. It was gleefulness of release that made it work so well.

The one question that had always lingered was *Why hasn't this stuff ever been released?* The cream of the band's best work was essentially unknown to all of their fans. This injustice has been addressed with the release of the compilation **In A Doghouse**. The 2-CD set compiles their original **Doghouse** cassette (1985), their debut LP (1986), the **Chains Changed EP** (1987) and some contemporary recordings (ie no Tanya) of 1983 original demos.

This collection captures a band carving out their own sparse metronomic weirdness and truly dark visions and serving it as pretty punkette girly rock. This was the origins of a different movement in post-punk, chicks who acted cute but could kick your ass at any moment... gone were the Gogo's and the Bangles' preciousness — these girls could mess you up, and weren't afraid to sing about it.

Tanya Donnelly's "Green," her lone contribution to their debut LP, harnesses the spirit of early Muses perhaps even better than Hersh herself. The modern menace is hidden under a thin veneer of vulnerability and wistful loneliness, the encapsulation of their stage appeal distilled into a single song. Hearing these songs again makes one won-

der... *What if?*... this strange quivering intensity disappeared very quickly in successive releases.

Before the Breeders and Belly, before the babies came, small barrooms near Boston shook with a desperate joy of intimidating intensity, and a small band had their fingers on the pulse of the source.

- Carwreck deBangs

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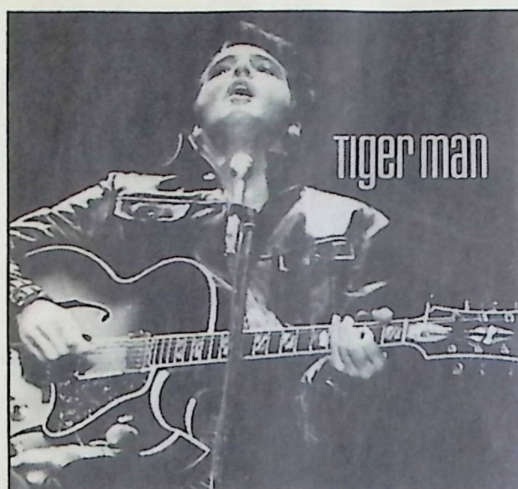
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ELVIS PRESLEY TIGER MAN RCA

When Elvis was released from the military, he found that the world of music had been irrevocably changed. Rock and Roll, that amorphous beast that he had helped to create, was no longer open to him. It made no difference, though, because he had already opened the Hollywood door and it was there that his salvation lay.

For the next ten years or so, he was able to retain his popularity by churning out film after film... each more ridiculous than the last. Finally, not even Elvis could take it. He wanted to return to music. But he was nervous, and understandably so. It had been a long time since he had performed in public. So they decided to make it easy on him.

They gathered together Scotty Moore (guitar) and DJ Fontana (drums) from his old recording days, and surrounded him with a number of old musician friends to help make things more comfortable. They put everyone on a small platform, vaguely resembling a boxing ring, and packed the room with a very small audience for a more "intimate" setting. They let him sing anything he wanted, stuck him in a black leather jumpsuit and waited to see what would happen.

The result was a laidback, easygoing performance that felt more like Elvis was in your living room than in Las Vegas. He joked with the band, telling stories of the past and from being on the road. He chose a number of songs which he hadn't played in years... and it showed. He stumbled over many of the lyrics but took it in stride - laughing and creating new ones on the spot. It was truly an intimate look at the King, and was immediately made unavailable. Until now. Thirty years later, RCA has released

this landmark performance in a CD that includes all of the banter, all of the jokes, the miscues, the embarrassment. It's Elvis, warts and all... and though it opened the door to the "Elvis-yet-to-be," it was truly the best he'd been in years and is well worth picking up.

- Phil Straub

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FIRESIGN THEATRE GIVE ME IMMOR- TALITY, OR GIVE ME DEATH Rhino

They're back with a passion. In their first new release in what seems like forever, Firesign Theatre shows that they still got it in spades. From old faves like Ralph Spoilsport to new characters like Bebop Loco and Chump Threads, the boys serve up a nonstop megamix of their rip-roaring comedy with **Give Me Immortality, Or Give Me Death**. For those not familiar with these guys, Firesign Theatre began in the late sixties as an unorthodox comedy improv group, lambasting virtually everyone and everything, thus becoming a mainstay of late night progressive radio. A whole generation became so familiar with their material that they could quote most of the sketches from memory. Before *Saturday Night Live*, they were the reigning gods of humor with such classic albums as **Don't Crush That Dwarf... Hand Me The Pliers** and

R e v i e w s

How Can You Be In Two Places At Once, When You're Not Anywhere At All?

In their heyday they actually inspired a few knock-offs like the Credibility Gap and the Conception Corporation who were quite good in their own right, but couldn't keep up with Firesign's prodigious and prolific output. They inspired the *National Lampoon Radio Hour* as well.

As the seventies dragged along, the albums diminished in quality a bit in my opinion. But this new one is better than all but the first three, no mean feat. Masters of aural disguise, they seem to have every accent down pat. The production, with myriad sound effects and

original music, is nothing short of visionary. And their satire is right up to date in the hip-hop era.

A few years back they performed at UMass to support their excellent double retrospective **Shoes For Industry** and made a couple of stopovers to local FM stations to leave their much sought after station IDs. It is a tribute to their longevity that the only spoken word material in so many collections then and now are their unique productions. If you possess even the bare rudiments of a sense of humor, you won't be disappointed with this one. Forty seven minutes and a cavalcade of hilarious album photos as well.

- Meathook Williams

webbed confines of everyone's adolescent psychological auditorium.

KISS' return to the stage two years ago was in response to continual fan demand for a reformation of the make-up era outfit. Part rock n' roll, part nostalgia, part Beatlemania-like recreation — KISS sold out arenas, but left many wondering how genuine an act it really was. News of a new quartet studio release was greeted with something less than enthusiasm by most who still cared. Not known for their songwriting skills during the last seventeen years, Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley had increasingly relied on outside partnerships to produce songs. It seemed extremely doubtful that reuniting with Ace Frehley (an unstable but genuine rock n' roll personality that's always been the band's source of credibility) and Peter Criss (once nationally reported-incorrectly to be homeless in California) would provide any sparks.

Opening with the title track, KISS launches into a pulsing riff-heavy invitation to return to their traveling circus, capturing the exuberance of their mid-70's prime. An Alice In Chains-like Simmons tune tries to update their sound, but quickly lurches back to some of the



KISS PSYCHO CIRCUS

Polygram

+

BLACK SABBATH REUNION

Epic



Occasionally, records can trigger strange memories of the past. People, faces, places... but sometimes records can summon up less defined events, more along the lines of feelings from the past. Like walking into your old elementary school, for instance. Breezing through the stairways, old classrooms, auditorium. So much of your childhood was spent here, and yet it seems unsettling and wrong to come and visit — sort of like disturbing a sealed tomb — some things are just supposed to be left alone.

Which brings us to the two releases in question, Black Sabbath's **Reunion** and KISS' **Psycho Circus**. Both albums are capable of triggering exactly this kind of scenario — KISS and Sabbath have arrived at this point from completely different paths to deposit themselves in the cob-

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primitive stomping that always made KISS so fun. Stanley's "I Pledge Allegiance to the State of Rock n' Roll" manages despite its moronic title to rock out and lay down whatever philosophies KISS ever stood for:

"I've been a rebel all my life, I never cared about regulations, I only went for things I liked, And my guitar was my inspiration... I stood my ground and took control, The legend's growin' as the story's told."

Simple and honest, KISS are unapologetic for their inanities, even revelling in them. Peter Criss' obligatory ballad "I Finally Found My Way" warbles embarrassingly along like some stilted "Still Crazy After All These Years" — even appropriating some of Paul Simon's phrasings. Gene Simmons solemnly proclaims "You are me, I am you, What you see is all true, We are one..." ("We Are One"). Paul Stanley urges all in anthemic chorus "Everyone around the nation, raise your glasses, raise your glasses, Lift your voice in celebration, raise your glasses" ("Raise Your Glasses"). A

rare burst of intemperance for Stanley, who practically fell all over himself in concert '96 issuing back-handed disclaimers about the dangers of drinking before introducing the **Alive I** fave, "Cold Gin."

Only Ace Frehley escapes taint and rises above the dross to deliver the one solid KISS classic, "Into the Void." A scorching workout reminiscent of his best work from his '78 solo LP, Ace loosely camouflages a song about getting completely blasted as Sci-Fi, one of his strongpoints. (Perhaps also too blasted to notice he'd nicked a famous Sabbath song title....)

Other highlights are the grunge-ish "You Wanted the Best" and "Dreaming," two songs faintly reminiscent of **Love Gun / Rock and Roll Over**. Not a disappointment, but **Destroyer** it ain't.

On the more muscular end of things is the 2-CD set from Black Sabbath's December '97 reunion show. Highly anticipated and utterly unpredictable, the original Sabbath quartet hadn't graced a stage (bar-

nasal whine and Tony Iommi's densely slashing guitar work top off a sound that, 25 years later, still sounds like it would scare your parents. Looking trim and fit (well, except Bill Ward, but he was never fit and trim — remember the red tights on **Sabotage**?), Butler, Iommi and Ozzy (and 17-year keyboardist Geoff Nichols) lay waste to 2 sold-out Birmingham audiences. Maintaining his rep as a heavy dude, Ozzy manages to say "fuck" at least 30 times before the last encore but it's unnecessary dressing. The music speaks for itself. From the expected ("Sweet Leaf," "Iron Man," "Paranoid") to the surprises ("Spiral Architect," "Sabbath Bloody Sabbath," "Lord of this World"), Sabbath shows what the meaning of the word **HEAVY** is. One of the few bands that successfully combined a musical, lyrical and conceptual heaviness, Sabbath shows why bands like KISS were always considered lightweight by those in the know, all flash and fire with no substance.

The classrooms echo with voices long since departed. There can be no return to the past, and it's dangerous to disturb deeply rooted memories of one's formative years. But like a quick flip through an old highschool yearbook or a brisk walk through an old playground, the ghosts can sometimes whisper, and make you smile.

- Carwreck deBangs

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ring a short set in '85 at Live Aid) since 1979's "Never Say Die" tour. Their warts n' all approach shows what made them the kings of heavy long ago. The unexpected return of drummer Bill Ward provides the chaotic thunder to propel Geezer Butler's truly monstrous bass riffs along. Ozzy's familiar

AAAB STAAP PHILOPHOBIA Chemikal Underground/Matador

Director Mike Leigh and actor David Thewlis created one of the most memorable antiheroes of, dare I say, all time in their '93 film **Naked**. The irrepressibly nasty Johnny hates his life-in-a-dufflebag existence of sluffing through England's alleyways. Anyone he meets must deal with a combination of his snarling insults, his bilious misogynic violence, and an impenetrably dismal barrage of doomsday prophecies. Not the type of guy

R e v i e w s



you'd want at your next cocktail party.

The same sentiment goes with Aidan Moffet. As lead asshole of Arab Strap, Moffet makes it clear from the get-go he's not trying out for a spot on anyone's R.S.V.P. list. "It was the biggest cock you'd ever seen / but you've no idea where that cock has been," is the lovely opening couplet on what must be one of the most bitter records in ages. By naming it **Philophobia** (fear of loving) and sticking nude paintings of himself and his ex on the CD jacket the hints are all too obvious.

Where Thewlis' Johnny spat out his insults in a fictional movie world, Moffet piles 'em on the listener guaranteeing in the liner notes "...any similarities to persons living or dead are entirely intentional." His lyrics, delivered with all the energy of a salted snail, are most effective when they become the most personal. "New Birds" and "The Night Before the Funeral" are read like drunken confessions, the listener becoming the priest to Moffet the sinner. Later the listener becomes his target on the profanity soaked "Piglet" and "The First Time You're Unfaithful."

With a shared sense of black humor, **Naked** and **Philophobia** also suffer the same flaw: it's all too much. They're both relentlessly bleak. This harsh depression backed with few contrasting emotions ultimately dulls over prolonged exposure. With that said it's hard to dismiss either as uninspired or totally unsuccessful. The poison

that Johnny and Moffet peddle doesn't work taken in large doses; but taken in small sips (scenes or individual songs) they're incredibly potent.

It was difficult to say, "Boy, I liked **Naked**! Go see it! It's great!" Just as it's difficult to say, "Golly, what great fun that new Arab Strap disc is!" Neither are fun, neither are great, but both are fascinating.

-Stuart Bloomfield

JON SPENCER BLUES EXPLOSION ACME

Matador/Capitol

If you like these guys, then you don't need to read this. Chances are, you probably already have this. However, if you haven't already picked it up, then I don't understand what you're waiting for. This is a great record, very funky and very reminiscent of **Orange** (1994), their third full-length record. Despite the variety of producers (at least six, including Steve Albini, Jim Dickinson and Alec Empire of Atari Teenage Riot), this is perhaps their most consistent record in years. Gone are the punk displays of jarring segues that broke up 1996's **Now I Got Worry**. Instead, there are a number of songs that delve into hip-hop territories... with commonly sampled musical breaks and the turntable scratching abilities of

the great Automator. While there are many disparate elements, they are all somehow combined to create the classic Blues Explosion sound. There is a lot of variety, which makes this perhaps one of the more consistently entertaining records out there now.

(www.matador.recs.com)

- Phil Straub

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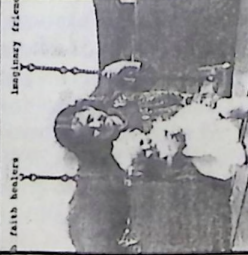
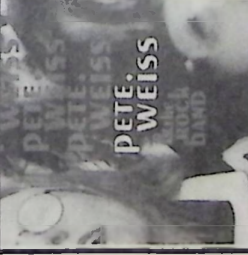

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PJ HARVEY IS THIS DESIRE? ISLAND www.pjharvey.net		4-Track Demos is still her best. Farty bass lines are a tasty feature here. Continues her string of excellent releases.	Will the real Most Important Female Artist (MIFA) of the '90s please stand up? PJ? Come on now, don't be shy...	SEGER: "Workin' on my Night Moves" DOLE: "Bob Dole thinks PJ needs one of Lizzie's homemade rhubarb pies."
JUMPROPE BOOKSHELF ADVENTURES REVERSE CURVE www.instantmag.com/reverse-curve		Massachusetts-based fluff lounge pop. Harmonies and melodies, sugar, spice and everything nice.	Total dorks but lovable (kinda like the cast of Real Genius). A band that's not afraid to be happy.	SEGER: "Never thought I'd like a record with a song called 'Kites Are Fun.'" DOLE: "Dole's never liked Star Trek geeks... never given a damn 'bout getting their votes neither."
HUGH HOPPER 1984 CUNIFORM		Wiggy reissue of '73 free jazz experiment for Orwell. Soft Machine fans everywhere (anywhere?) unite!	Just goes to show everything new is really old. Diggers of Tortoise, the 'Lab, Lurie, even Kronos should find something here. Avant-cool.	SEGER: "Uhhh... I like the cover, it reminds me of a Ford logo." DOLE: "Un-American."
WHALE ALL DISCO DANCE MUST END IN BRO- KEN BONES HUT/VIRGIN www.gowhale.com		Four years after their under-appreciated smutty debut, We Care , these sassy Swedes have chilled.	All sorts of good stuff here. Excellent guesting by Cream from Addis Black Widow.	SEGER: "This is what I tried to do with the Silver Bullet Band." DOLE: "Bob Dole likes the rock. Bob Doles likes the roll."

<p>FURSLIDE ADVENTURE MEANWHILE/ VIRGIN</p>		<p>Industry standard Morrisette-like wails and complaints backed by nicely paced ups 'n' downs.</p>	<p>Yeah, why not.</p>	<p>SEGER: "My teenagers will love this." DOLE: "My grand-kids' teenagers will love this."</p>
<p>CAT POWER MOON PIX MATADOR</p>		<p>U.S. indie-cover girl's adventures in Australia with Dirty 3 dudes.</p>	<p>More varied material than Chan's previous LPs equals much better listenin'. Highly recommended.</p>	<p>SEGER: "She's purdy." DOLE: "As T.L.C. once said, 'Crazy... Sexy... Cool'."</p>
<p>TH' FAITH HEALERS IMAGINARY FRIEND TOO PURE/ AMERICAN members.magnet.at/h/prill/healers/html</p>		<p>A magnificent layer cake of guitars and noise. Second and last release from one of the decade's coolest rock outfits.</p>	<p>A monster hit that never got heard. Poses the question, <i>If Godzilla falls in a forest and no one hears</i>, et al.</p>	<p>SEGER: "If I had ever been this good, I'd have been completely ignored too." DOLE: "Music to fight wars to."</p>
<p>PETE WEISS & THE ROCK BAND [SELF-TITLED] REVERSE CURVE</p>		<p>The musical equivalent of an 'L' hand gesture to the forehead.</p>	<p>Let's put it this way... They open with a song about their mail man.</p>	<p>SEGER: "These kids need to drink more Budweiser." DOLE: "I think it's kinda catchy, especially the one about Gertrude Stein."</p>
<p>SEAM THE PACE IS GLACIAL TOUCH AND GO members.xoom.com/seampage</p>		<p>One of the U.S.'s brightest 'n' brainiest rock outfits mellow the tone, ups the poli- tics. Still searching for the spark that brought '93's bracingly urgent Problem With Me.</p>	<p>Spiked with gems ("Prizefighters" and the coda, "Aloha Spirit"), but disappoint- ing overall. Might age well (like a good Cheddar).</p>	<p>SEGER: "Sooyoung sounds like me, only younger and more Asian." DOLE: "Bob Dole would like to give these boys a 1994 election year commemorative pen."</p>

I am aware of the moles. I am aware of the moles because I am covered with moles. Why, I have no idea. Not one member of my family has even so much as a blackhead, and here I am, a walking sheet of Braille. I am also keenly aware of the poster, the poster of the mole I saw on the subway car coming home from Catechism last Wednesday, that poster that magnifies the mole about 350,000 times, depicting the mole in various stages of metamorphosis, with big serious black letters beneath each stage warning: SEE MOLE. SEE MOLE CHANGE. SEE A DOCTOR. I am now so aware of moles that I can practically see the moles changing before my eyes.

Changing color, changing texture, changing size. Threatening to bubble over in hideous disease. I can feel them incubating on the small of my back like a colony of ticks. I look at them in the morning before school, with mirrors and magnifying glasses, making detailed mental notes of the slightest variations: the deepening crease on the one under my left nipple, the ever-multiplying cluster of them under my armpit, the one three inches below my navel I've never seen before in my life. It's like trying to identify constellations on a chart of the midnight sky. I feel compelled to give them names. I am thirteen years old. In the prime of my life. Moleridden.

Certain I am soon to die, I spend a lot of time praying. On my knees. Beside my Roy Rogers/Dale Evens bedspread in the Wild Bill Hickock-wallpapered room I share with my brother. I pray Our Fathers. I pray Hail Marys. I pray and pray, eyes closed, trying to block out my brother's derisive laughter from the bed above. "Why dontcha use your rosary beads, Bishop Sheen?"

MOLE



by bob flaherty

.....

"Because they remind me of moles," I say. And that just about kills him.

My brother's relentless laughter has been known to have a contagious effect on me in public and solemn places, such as church, which is why the two of us are kept far apart when dragged there, sitting at opposite ends of the pew — three properly dressed sisters, two parents and old Aunt Fran between us. But in that dreary and sorrowful place, where white-haired Monsignors drone like taxicab dispatchers, where old men snore and little kids squirm and organists play selections from *Frankenstein*, all it takes to get my brother in gear is for that fat old guy in back to start blowing his nose like Tarzan summoning the elephants. By the time Dad pinch-hits for one of the ushers and accidentally slams old lady Flambeau right in the kisser with the collection basket, my brother is completely buckled over, and so am I, drowning in hysteria with things coming out of

our noses. Mother beats us on the way home, of course, sometimes all the way home, sometimes on the way to church as a preemptive strike, with anything she can get her hands on — her pocketbook, her shoe, the Sunday paper — while Dad drives the car with his arm out the window and smokes.

But *today* I am praying. I am *really* praying. I am kneeling by my bed and I am praying. I am praying for a sign. Something. Anything. My cackling brother would be struck down dumb. Anything that'll make me believe that what I am praying is to God and not just a bedspread covered with cowboys. And then my mother charges into the room.

"Bobby! That was Monsignor Burke! He wants you to serve mass this Sunday!"

My brother laughs, "You mean like an alter boy?"

"Yes!" she cries, "The 8:30 Sunday morning! Oh, I've got to call Aunt Fran and tell her we'll pick her up for the early one, and I'll shine up your good black shoes and get some Beau Junior to put in your hair and I'll call Pop-pop and Gram-gram and, ohhh, I'm just so proud of you!" And she kisses me on the cheek and dances downstairs to get started.

I do remember signing up for altar boying. I remember taking the classes on Saturday with Father Gillipede and 3 or 4 other kids. But I never got called cause I was rotten at it. I never bothered learning the little Latin responses you were supposed to say back at the priest (I just went "ooby-dooby-ubba-dubba.") And I was never sure exactly when you were supposed to ring the little bell, or how many times you were supposed to ring it, or when you were supposed to get up and move the priest's big hooby bible from one end of the alter to the other, while

he just stood there reading words off it, his hands raised like some quack about to take somebody's gall bladder. And I never understood why the priest didn't just move his own bible, instead of leaving it up to little scrawny kids like me, a ribcage with a cowlick, who struggled with the thing as if it was a refrigerator. For me to get assigned to serve as a mass on Sunday morning can only mean that an outbreak of mumps or something had bowled through the rest of the altar boys like a plague of hail and locusts. And to be called in now, in my darkest hour, while I'm on my knees praying to God knows what, wondering which of my two million festering moles will be the one to do me in, can be nothing less than a sign. "Abandon your worries, my son," it appears to be telling me, "for soon you shall dwell at the right hand of God." A swell of Christianity comes into me, along with a measure of maturity, carrying over to the next morning, Sunday morning, and the moment I and Floydie Simmons (another rookie) follow Monsignor Burke in a procession out of the sacristy, looking much like Monsignors ourselves, freshly scrubbed in our white surplices and our long black buttoned-down-to-ankles cassocks. I glance out at the full house before me. Aside from my beaming parents, grandparents, sisters, aunt, and softly giggling brother in the third row, I know none of these people. (We never go to the 8:30 mass.) I've seen a couple of them around town, I guess, but never here, gussied up in their pearls and ill-fitting suits. During Monsignor's sermon, while I'm sitting off to one side, I spot an enormous mahogany-haired woman all alone in the first row, stuffed into a bathroom wallpaper-print dress (pink and green amoebas against a black background) with a huge necklace of skeeball-sized pearls around her massive neck, a gargantuan pocketbook at her side and a face, despite all this, that was kind and sort of pretty. She wears lots of bracelets and brooches and earrings and, at first, I mistake the thing sticking out of her neck as more of the same. But

wait a minute, I say, how can jewelry stick out of a neck? I steal another glance, and another, and another. My body and my head remain motionless, staring straight ahead, focussed on nothing but Monsignor. Only my eyes move, returning again and again to the thing, which was real, which was attached to a stem, and which quivered each time she exhaled. My god, I gasp, the damn thing's a *mole*! A swollen, pinkish, peach-fuzzed monstrosity the size, shape and color of a Boston baked *bean*! On a *stem*! Moving! My peripheral vision tells me that my brother is in convulsions but I don't look at him. I just look at the lady. I just look at the mole. I can hear the Monsignor drone on. I can feel Floydie Simmons fidget. But I can't take my eyes off the mole. Then a thin ray of sunlight filters down a crack in the stained glass to a spot on the tip of my freshly shined shoe. I'm certain I'm receiving a sign. And the sign says, "My son, you are going to live! You are going to live a long

and prosperous life!" And it makes sense to me that if this poor woman can sit here, right in front of every clodhopper in town, and survive to a reasonable age with a thing on her neck like a dart from a pygmy's blowgun, then none of my puny little moles are gonna amount to anything. I can hear my brother squeaking and tittering and desperately holding his sides but it has no effect on me at all. I feel so grown up I may enter the priesthood. Rigidly I sit there, as if my portrait's being done, feeling the Savior all around me, and Monsignor honks and honks, Floydie picks his ears, and my brother laughs and laughs.

I move effortlessly through all the other parts of the mass, lugging the Monsignor's hooby old book like it's nothing and nudging old Floydie when it's time to ring the bell. I recite Latin-like gibberish that almost sounds like it's Latin, and when it's time to pray, I pray bowed over, like a Turk in some mosque, my genuflections sweep-



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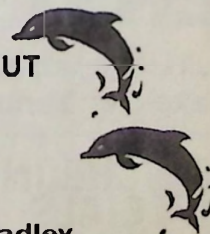
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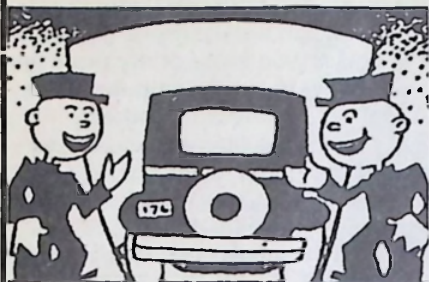
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ing, majestic acts of adoration. And when it's time to serve communion and I accompany Monsignor to the railing to assist him in the serving of it, I see my parents and grandparents proudly lining up, and, by the adoring look on my mother's face, you'd have thought I'd been ordained archbishop.

My function in this part of the mass involves a tray — this small, flat gold plated thing the size of a ping pong paddle that you're supposed to slide under the chin of each communicant as they kneel at the railing and open their mouths to receive. You steady the tray there to catch any crumbs or drool that may come spewing out, and right down the line you go. But the tongues. You are not prepared for the tongues. You had not, in fact, up to this point, ever had a solitary thought about tongues. Or, if you had a

thought of them, it had always been the Warner Brothers Technicolor cartoon version that had just popped into your head — the fire-engine red kind with the jaunty white highlight. But these pale, pockmarked

abominations before you, wriggling hungrily out of the mouths of one 75 year old parishioner after another, are enough to make you swoon. "Put those despicable slabs of uncooked octopus meat back in your mouths!" I want to shout. "You look like birds in a nest waiting for your mother to bring you worms!" And each tongue we come upon is more disturbing than the last; and I am in this particular frame of mind when we arrive, the Monsignor and I, at The Lady With The Mole.

Her eyes being closed, I am able to study the atrocity in minute detail. My God, I breathed, it's actually furry! And although my brother is waiting his turn at the railing right behind her, tears of hysteria glistening on his cheeks, I am oblivious. The tray, which had shaking in my trembling hands, was now still. I had been calmed by the thing on this large lady's neck. But as she opens wide her jaws to receive the host from the Monsignor's steady fingers, something extraordinary happens. The mole, suddenly, sharply, and without warning, *disappears!* Slaps itself against the side of her neck as if on a *hinge!* Conceals itself behind her *ear!* And as she closes her mouth to chew, I stare in wide-eyed disbelief as it comes swinging back out like the sign at a railroad crossing, quivering like a willow in the wind. "Jesus Christ!" I say, loud enough to be heard, "The mole has a life of it's own!"

And I know that it's wrong just to stand there, jaw dropped in stupor, hands dropped at my sides. And I know that it's wrong for the Monsignor to have to nudge me, nudge me, nudge me, trying to snap me back to business. And I know it's wrong to release my grip on the tray's handle and send it clanging to the rug in front of my parents and all creation. But I know that it's very, very wrong to even think about gazing in the direction of my brother, who's helplessly pissing his pants and whimpering, four or five feet away. But gaze I do. His eyes meet mine. And all is lost.

Guilty Pleasures

michael charles hill

THE RAPTURE [1991]

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED
BY MICHAEL TOLKIN
STARRING: MIMI
ROGERS,
DAVID DUCHOVNY
& WILL PATTON

THEN THE WOMAN FLED
INTO THE DESERT
WHERE SHE HAD A PLACE
PREPARED FOR HER
BY GOD.

- Book of
Revelations,
Chapter 12,
Verse 6

Novelist-turned-screenwriter, Michael Tolkin [THE PLAYER, THE NEW AGE] made his directorial debut examining man's eternal question of faith, in this story of a woman's quest for divine salvation.

Mimi Rogers [BULLETPROOF HEART, SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME] stars as Sharon, a beautiful, yet lonely, spiritually rudderless, and morally bankrupt, Los Angeles telephone operator who spends her nights engaging in meaningless sex acts with her seemingly financially independent friend, Vic, played by Patrick Bauchau [THE NEW AGE, THE STATE OF THINGS], and assorted and multiple partners. Through one of these liaisons, she meets Randy, a drifter/hustler played by David Duchovny [KALIFORNIA, X-FILES], with a less than savory background, and begins a casual one-on-one affair.

But something is missing from Sharon's life. Something that she can't quite wrap her mind around. That is until a series of events occur in near succession. It begins with overheard veiled whispers by some co-workers about a Boy Prophet, a giant pearl, and the impending day of judgment. Followed by a visit to her apartment by two Bible-toting missionaries who tell her to trust in God. And then, during one of her and Vic's sexual encounters she meets a beautiful young woman with an elaborate tattoo upon her back depicting a giant pearl within the Hand of God.

Finally, late one night, Sharon snaps and tosses Randy out of her bed and out of her apartment, claiming that she has to change the direction of her life and must seek salvation.

With Randy gone, freshly showered and with clean sheets on the bed, she begins to pray to God. She prays for guidance and acceptance. She prays for the dream of the Pearl. But to no avail.

The next day, after picking up Tommy, a hitchhiking ex-con, played by James Le Gros [GUN CRAZY, LIVING IN OBLIVION], and lures him to a Hollywood motel for what he believes will be some cheap sex, she steals his gun and sends him on his way. She then proceeds to drink herself drunk so that she may work up the courage to kill herself. In the end, she doesn't have the strength and resorts to reading the complimentary Gideon bible and has her first vision of the Pearl.

At work, Sharon is transformed and, convinced that she has to prepare the public for the return of Christ, asks each of her callers if they have met God. She is subsequently reprimanded by her supervisor for spending too much time with each call, only to learn that he too is a believer. He invites her to participate in a Bible group and she finally meets the Boy Prophet, who tells the group that they are five to six years away from the

Second Coming.

Sharon, having quit her life with Vic, now pledges her love to Randy, assuring him that she will pray for the both of them. Randy finally succumbs.

Flash forward six years and Sharon and Randy are married and living in suburbia with their six-year old daughter, Mary, happy in the knowledge that the End is coming soon.

But Randy, now a businessman, is tragically murdered by a disgruntled and disturbed former employee. Sharon comforts their daughter by telling her that her daddy is in Heaven waiting for them and with Judgment Day just around the corner, they will be seeing him soon. They must trust in God.

Soon after the funeral, while walking past a Foto-Mat, Sharon sees an image of Randy superimposed in an anonymous family's vacation photographs. The Boy Prophet tells her that it is a sign from God instructing her to go to the desert and wait for Him. But no else in their group has had these visions - no one else has been "invited". She must go alone, as God wants her for a special purpose. She must trust in God.

With little food and clothes, Sharon and Mary drive out to the desert and begin their vigil. Day after day, they wait. And wait. And wait.

Soon, Mary, overcome with hunger and grief, becomes distraught and convinces her mother that they should kill themselves rather than wait any longer. Sharon reluctantly agrees, but after killing her daughter, she once again, does not have the strength to kill herself - not because she is a coward, but rather because suicide is a mortal sin and prevents one from entering Heaven.

Speeding out of the desert, she is pulled over by Foster, a local sheriff, played by Will Patton [ROMEO IS BLEEDING, THE SPITFIRE GRILL], who had befriended her and her daughter days before. When Sharon confesses to the murder of her child, he arrests her and takes her to jail.

In her cell, she continues to struggle with her faith. She decides that she doesn't love God anymore. He has too many rules. He let her kill her little girl and yet He still expects her to love Him.

In the next cell is the aforementioned Tattooed Woman. She too has found God and assures Sharon that if she were to trust in the word of God, He will forgive all her sins. But what Sharon wants to know is: "Who forgives God?"

The film ends, as predicted, with the Second Coming and because Sharon can not profess her love for God - because she can not forgive Him for all the pain and suffering He has created on Earth - she is left alone.

She is right back where she started. And this time it is for eternity.

What is the message of this film? Maybe Michael Tolkin is holding up a mirror to our collective faces/consciences inviting us to gaze upon our own reflections and ponder our own faith - or lack thereof. Or maybe he is simply sticking his finger in the proverbial eye of religion. You decide.

40 THE PERFECT VERMONT

BY JOSEPH A. CITRO

The Green Mountain State has always nurtured unconventional religious expression. Of our many contenders for Vermonters' souls, one of the most unorthodox - and by far my favorite - was John Humphrey Noyes. Born in Brattleboro in 1811 to wealthy, influential and especially pious parents, John would eventually challenge - albeit briefly - not only religious, but also social, political and economic values in America.

Dartmouth educated, he bucked his family's values and became an agnostic for a while. During this time he practiced law in the Brattleboro office of his brother-in-law, Larkin Mead, while he tried to overcome the family "affliction." John, along with his father and uncles, suffered from what they all perceived as an hereditary ailment - a paralyzing shyness around women. How he compensated for that deficit would become obvious as his life continued to change.

In 1831 he experienced a religious awakening that lead him to become a graduate of Andover and Yale theology schools.

Rejection by the woman he loved, Abigail Merwin, and the revocation of his preaching license in 1834, propelled John into a "dark night of the soul." During this contemplative period he rejected the conventional religious notion of eternal damnation. He came to believe that Christ's second coming had already occurred, and that everyone was thus released from sin.

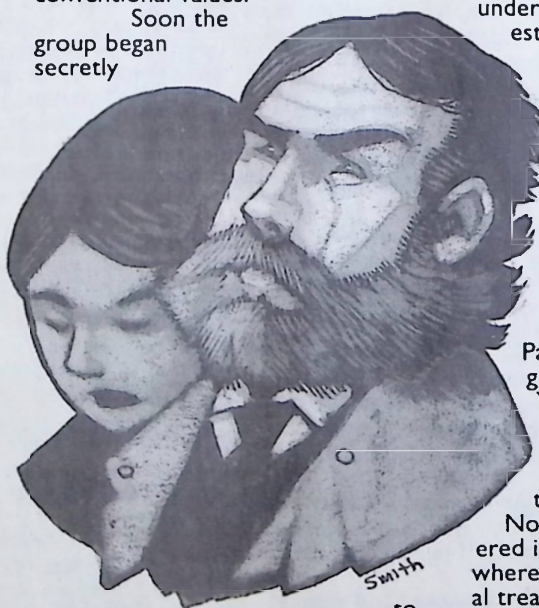
With no sin to worry about, the remaining task before humankind was to attain Perfection. So John contrived his own version of the already existing doctrine of Perfectionism.

In 1838 he married Harriet Holton, perhaps his first convert to Perfectionism. Together they put John's complex and constantly evolving beliefs into practice at a com-

mune he founded in Putney, Vermont.

By 1843 his Perfectionist Community included 28 adults and 9 children. They had 500 acres of land, seven houses, a printing shop and a store. Hard work and education were two of the commune's more conventional values.

Soon the group began secretly



practice what John called Complex Marriage. This simply meant that every man was married to every woman - and vice versa. Any pairing was permitted for sexual intercourse. The only rule was that folks mustn't get attached to each other: such monogamy was considered selfish and idolatrous.

John wrote, "In a holy community there is no more reason why sexual intercourse should be restrained by law, than why eating and drinking should be - and there is little occasion for shame in one case as in the other."

Still, sexual partners had to gain each other's consent, "not by private conversation and courtship, but through the intervention of

some third person or persons." More often than not, Noyes himself.

It is not difficult to imagine how well this notion went over with the good people of Putney. But public contempt was temporarily assuaged because at the same time, John was showing some surprising results with his experiments in "magnetic healing." So, they thought, maybe there really was some substance to this odd prophet in their midst.

A LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER

John's attention to, and pursuit of, fifteen year old Lucinda J. Lamb, coupled with his apparent disrespect for her parents, began to undermine whatever credibility he'd established in the Putney community.

Ultimately, in 1847, John's paradise was lost when a local man, Daniel Hall, who'd almost converted to Perfectionism, decided to pull out. He turned around and accused John of adultery. An arrest warrant was issued with ample community outrage to back it up.

"Then," as historian John Parker Lee wrote, "with irreligious haste he fled to New York, and his flight was imitated by many of the Perfectionists." Or, as William Hines somewhat more sympathetically recalled in 1911, "Mr. Noyes and his followers considered it prudent to remove to a place where they were sure of more liberal treatment."

PARADISE REGAINED

They relocated to New York, where religious eccentricity has always been something of a virtue. There, in the town of Oneida, John founded the now-famous Oneida Community.

Perfectionists began to build the gigantic brick "Mansion House" where they would all live like one great big functional family. At last John and his growing number of followers were free to continue their practice of Complex Marriage while they resolutely "perfected" other unconventional methods of social harmony.

Within the complex struc-

ture of complex marriage, the Perfectionists practiced a controversial form of birth control called male continence, perhaps best described as knowing when to quit. Since success required practice - especially among the community's younger, most testosterone-charged members - a training program called ascending fellowship was developed.

According to ascending fellowship, the older, most godly members of the community would each select a fourteen year old virgin to be spiritually responsible for. Men who mentored the young women were presumably already adept at male continence. The women who trained the boys were invariably beyond child-bearing age, and thus protected against the inevitable "accidents."

The convoluted nature of some of the resulting interpersonal relationships necessitated the process of mutual criticism. In this precursor of today's group therapy, community members would take turns being reprimanded, or criticized, for breeches in social protocol, personal peculiarities, and spiritual flaccidity.

In *Without Sin*, his history of the Oneida Community, Spencer Klaw quotes from the criticism session of a Vermont native. The man was chastised for, "stiffness of character, too much gravity and not enough veracity; an over-estimation of New England men and" - almost predictably - "too frequent mention of Vermont."

The Perfectionists also experimented with an early form of eugenics manipulation called "Stirpiculture." Here the men and women who were deemed most physically, mentally, and spiritually ascended were given the responsibility of producing offspring. In his sixties at the time stirpiculture was implemented, John Humphrey Noyes nonetheless managed to sire nine of the fifty-eight children born during this experiment.

What

some considered the most misguided of the Perfectionists' beliefs remains unpopular to this day: the equality of the sexes. John Humphrey Noyes and his followers believed absolutely that men and women were completely equal. Generally, assignments and responsibilities at the community demonstrated this belief system.

As perverse as much of this sounds, Noyes's experiment in communal living was quite successful for a while. In fact, it was the most successful of the many nineteenth century utopian communities. It flourished for more than thirty years.

In general its people were happy, well-educated, and the children produced by complex marriage were eager to remain at, or return to, the colony. As a visiting journalist wrote at the time, "I am bound to say as an honest reporter, that I looked in vain for the visible signs of either the suffering or the sin. The fact that the children of the community hardly ever wish to leave it; that the young men whom they send to Yale College, and the young women whom they send for musical instruction to New York, always return eagerly and devote their lives to the community - this proves a good deal. There is no coercion to keep them, as in Mormonism, and there are no monastic vows, as in the Roman Catholic Church. This invariable return, therefore, shows that it is of a kind which wins the respect of the young and generous. A body must have great confidence in itself when

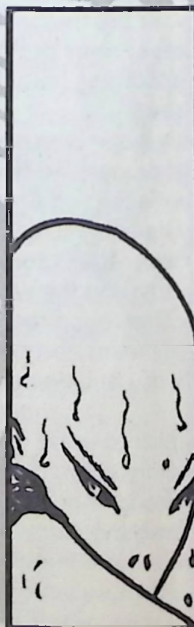
it thus voluntarily sends its sheep into the midst of the world's wolves and fearlessly expects their return...."

Of course Oneida didn't work its wonders on all prospective members. Charles Guiteau left in 1866 after repeatedly failing to find sexual partners. He then denounced the community, saying it had been founded solely to satisfy Noyes's sexual appetites and that premature sexual experience "dwarfed" community women, making them "small and thin and homely." However, Guiteau went on to bigger and better things. Fourteen years after leaving, he assassinated James Abram Garfield, leaving the presidency to Vermonter Chester A. Arthur.

Ultimately, as is often the case with cults, when the leader steps down, the institution fails. And so it was with John Humphrey Noyes.

Noyes's nineteenth century efforts at communal living, spiritual harmony, and improved conditions for workers evolved into a twentieth century business known the world over.

Today, there are still houses standing in Putney where the Perfectionists lived - three and four families in each. No plaques mark these historic spots and tourists are not encouraged to locate them. To many of the citizens of Putney, Vermont, John Humphrey Noyes is little more than a colorful if somewhat embarrassing memory.



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THE NURSE IS IN

JESSICA
FALLER-
BERGER
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CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN THE TRADITIONS OF SPIRITUALITY AND HEALING AN EDITORIAL

Spirituality, religion and God: these ethereal strongholds intersect with medicine in ways familiar to humans since ancient times. Health practices more than 20,000 years old enjoy reinvigoration in today's parlors. Approaches to healing from B.C. to present share striking similarities. Could this uncanny resemblance be attributed to the cosmic consciousness, will to power, or God? Secular scientific methods prove ecclesiastical motivated health practices. These practices include faith healing, medication, and surgery. Before concluding that medication and surgery are divorced from faith healing, consider the following:

Surgeons, Shamans, Rabbis, Priestesses, Nurses, Witchdoctors, and Clergy; all are imbued with the ability to heal. While the customs of these practitioners differ, they share a common goal. Those who inspire the confidence, or faith, of their patients are best able to cure. To the believer, this suggests that there is a higher power that has always guided humans toward a common cure for their ills. Scientifically derived medicine parallels ancient, spiritually guided healing in the example below.

Long before Epidemiologists blazed an aseptic trail to eradicate pandemics, the ancient Hebrews incorporated hygiene into their ritual religion. Think of Kosher law as a precursor to sterile technique. "Medicine and religion had not yet separated. Sanitation, at (the Hebrews') hands became a religious precept, and the (Rabbis) were sanitary (teachers)"(1). Kosher diets prohibit pork. Modern discovery of trichinosis in undercooked pork demonstrates the medical utility of Kosher law. Additionally, the Kosher (clean) tradition of hand-washing before meals presages microbiologists' discovery of the oral-fecal mode of disease transmission. Next, divine inspiration and instinct play a role in resolving the smallpox epidemic.

Around 1798, the British Physician Edward Jenner encountered a young milkmaid. She explained to Jenner that a prior infection with cow-pox rendered her invulnerable to smallpox. Spurned on by the milkmaid's certitude, Jenner invented a vaccine which eventually vanquished smallpox.(2) Devoid of medical cre-

dentials, Jenner's anonymous milkmaid likely personifies a divine conduit.

Transcending time and space to "mediate between spirit forms and people"(3), the Native Shamans date back 40,000 years to the era of Stone-Age Hunter Gatherers(4). These Healer Priests discovered many of our modern medications. They prescribed certain plants thought to house healing spirits. These plant-spirits soothed the afflicted when eaten. Evil, disease-causing spirits could be driven from the flesh by ingesting other plants. In like fashion, Medieval Christians healed the sick through the exorcism of satanic-spirits. Ethnobotany rescues from extinction a wealth of herbal medical knowledge practiced by Jungle Shamans. Nicole Maxwell catalogues this wisdom in *The Witch Doctor's Apprentice*.

MEDICAL SYMBOLISM WITH RELIGIOUS ROOTS

Religious traditions continue to inform modern medicine through symbolism and language. Unconsciously, we steep ourselves in these bygone rituals. For instance, Aesculapius, the deified Greek hero of medicine, carried a snake-entwined staff. This staff remains the emblem of physicians today(2). Aesculapius' daughters, named Hygieia and Panacea, reverberate throughout today's medical jargon. From Hygieia derives hygiene, the study of health and methods for preserving health. A panacea is a universal remedy for all ills(5). Wounded and sick citizens of Greece journeyed to Aesculapius' temples, where they waited for the priests to cure them. The Greek Priests bestowed faith healing, medications, surgery, soothing baths and special diet upon the ailing masses(1).

The caduceus is one of many medical accouterments with a spiritual progenitor. Another religious based medical symbol is the Red Cross. During Queen Elizabeth's reign, any home infected by the plague was marked by a green cross. After 1864, the green cross was replaced by the red cross and the words "Lord Have Mercy on Us" were written upon the quarantine's door. The word "quarantine" means "forty days" in Italian. The Bible specifies a forty day isolation period for infected individuals(1).

Elements similar to those of the Ancient Greeks are contained in "religions aligned with African belief"(6). The widely misunderstood Voodoo religion is rich with spiritual symbolism and language. According to Teish, in New Orleans, the deities were known as the Court of the Seven Sisters. Compare these Seven Sisters to the deified Greek sisters. Zombies, or the "walking dead" are rep-

resented by a caduceus-like rattlesnake. The Voodoo concept of the walking dead is shared by the Ancient Gaelic peoples of Ireland. Gaelic religion includes belief in Faerie legend. "It is a fact that fairy belief informs and animates Gaelic romance for at least 1000 years, (including) a practice amongst faeries of carrying away living people and leaving a substitute in place of them. It seems that these substitutes are corpses..."(7).

The tradition of hygiene, practiced by the Ancient Hebrews and Greeks, is reiterated in both Gaelic and African religions. Irish Gaelic faerie lore, dating back some 2000 years proclaims "...nothing is more pleasing to faeries than a well swept kitchen and clean water." Those who do not keep a clean home are summarily punished by these sprites. In Haiti, festivals are held to promote healing through sacred cleansing water rites. Believers are cured of cancer through the healing of the androgynous Voodoo deity, Obatala(6).

Belief in a God or Deities is not required for successful faith healing. In fact Atheists and Agnostics have reported belief in healing angels. According to a Gallop Poll, 69% of Americans believe in angels, and 46% say they have their very own guardian angel. Those suffering in the throes of cancer encounter angels who are able to grant them peace from psychological torment. Derived from the Greek word, meaning messenger, angels have been reported by Muslims, Jews, and Christians(8).

Where conventional medicine fails, faith healing transcends the infinite.

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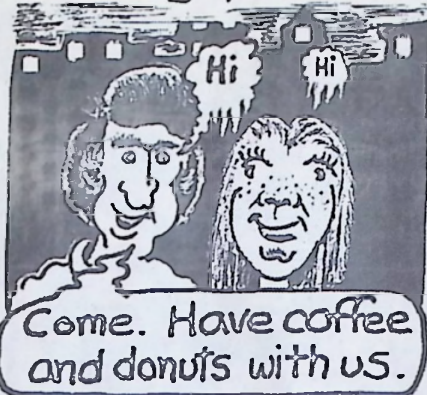
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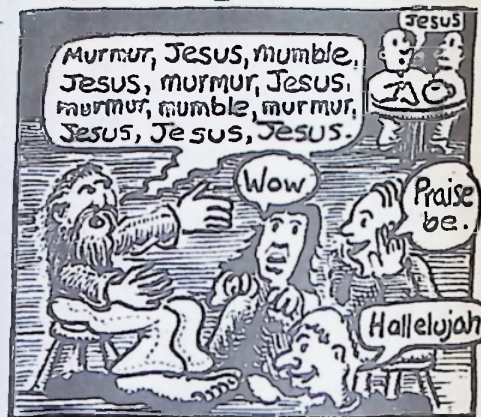
SAVED

by *Renrut*
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Winter, 1972.
Edinburgh, Scotland.



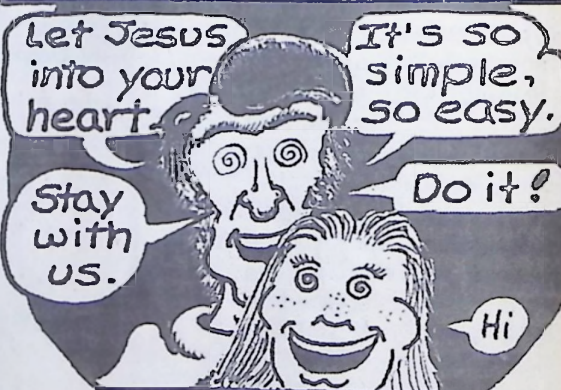
They took me to
the coffee-house.



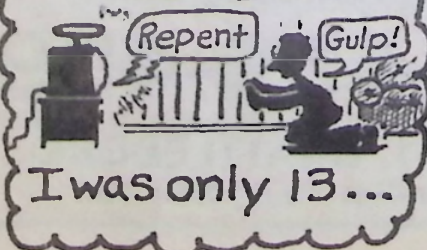
I've done it all. Sex,
India, rock'n roll,
speed, alcohol. But
now I've found Jesus.



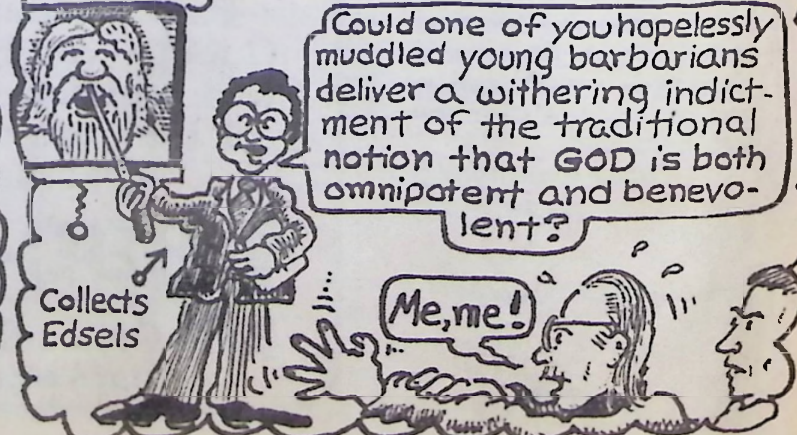
The only thing glazed
were his eyes.



Once, I
knelt before the
TV and prayed
because Billy
Graham told
me to...



Five years later in Philosophy
of Religion with Prof. Halbermehl.



AT LAST! A CHANCE TO USE MY LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION !

IF GOD is all-powerful, then He can not be benevolent, since He allows suffering and evil to exist and even thrive in the world.

Ergo, if GOD is benevolent, He must not be omnipotempheff...



So he sang.

Another guy joined in.

Another sang.

And another.

Louder still.



Every damn person in that room was singing to me. In the end...

... they burst into frenzied hosannas!



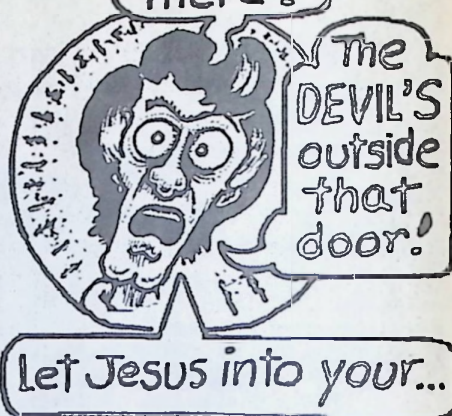
Well, thanks for the donut.



The main man grabbed me!



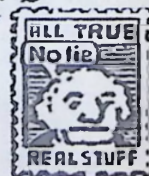
Don't go out there!



...heart?



That was a close one, pal!

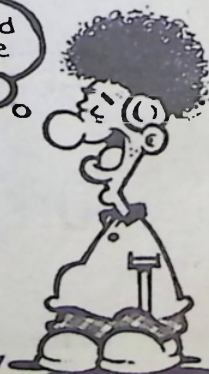


INTRODUCING:

if you insist on wearing a toupee, please buy one that matches your existing hair.

up yours.

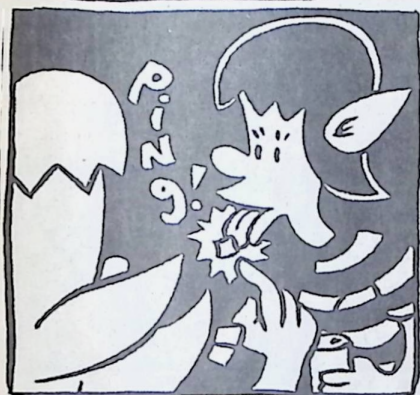
heh-heh!...and no one's the wiser!



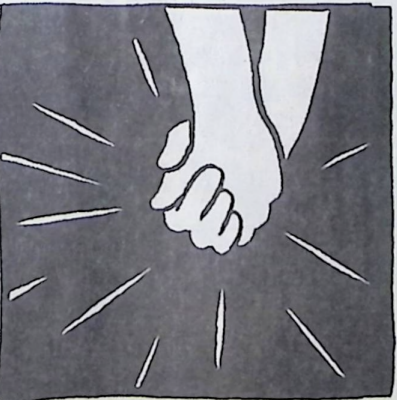
Pydina Boy '88 c.s.

MAGIC BOY AND GIRLFRIEND

HERE'S THE PARTY WHERE
MAGIC BOY FALLS IN LOVE



IT SEEMS SILLY BUT THEY
DID FALL IN LOVE ON ACID



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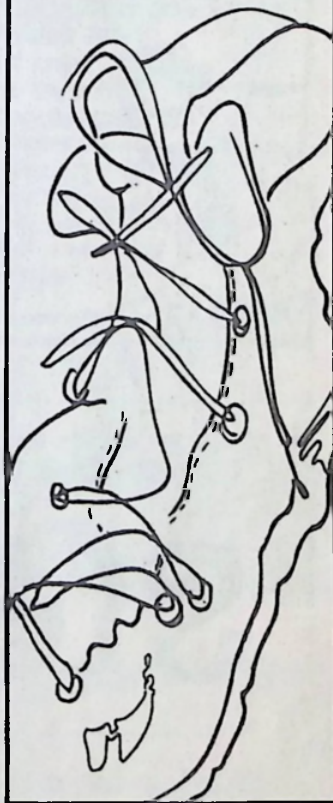
by Roger and Salem Salloom © 1997

Lynn and Leold were thinking about going steady, but they weren't quite sure it'd work.

So, Leold said, "Let's give it a try and let God decide."

Lynn said, "That's beautiful."

Three weeks later, Leold said, "God decided that Lynn belongs in Hell."



47

are you attempting
to console me?

(sigh...)
he looks good.

up yours.

HE'S FUCK-
ING DEAD!





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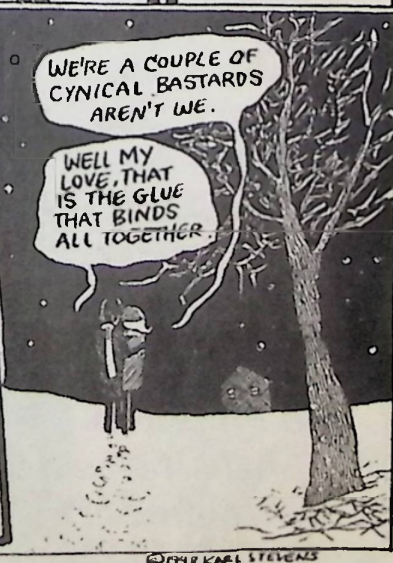
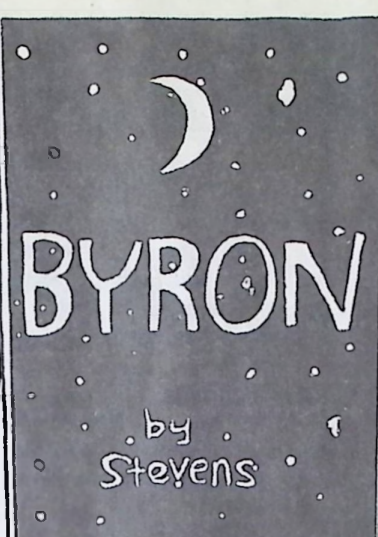
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my middle
name, and
nobody comes
back the same
from Bitch
School."**

Spring ahead, fall back, as they say. The leaves are gone, the ground's too chilly for al fresco fun, so it's time to think indoor sports. As the days grow shorter, fall back into bed for a long night with a new lover, get a group of special friends together for extra-hot hot-tubbing or, better yet, invite the neighbors over for a strip-poker tournament. Be sure to send an invite to Big Bitch. She's one of the worst poker players you've ever met, but she's never a sore loser. And she'll always stay in 'til the end of the hand, just to see what you've got.

Dear Big Bitch,
I didn't know the meaning of bitch until I read your column. Damn! Are you ever a bitch!
- Ian in CT

Dear Ian,
How incredibly perceptive of you! A young man with your intelligence is bound to go far. Perhaps all the way to Hartford!

Dear Big Bitch,
Turkey time is nearly here. What's your favorite stuffing?
- Martha S.
Easthampton, N.Y.

Dear Martha,
My favorite stuffing?

Sausage of course. But if you're a vegetarian, substitute zucchini, and remember - greasing the cavity with a little butter will make everyone's holiday go a little more smoothly! (And save that last tango for me.)
Bon appetit!

Dear Big Bitch,
I desperately need your help with the ways of love and romance. How do I get my now ex-girlfriend back?
- R.C., Esq.

Dearest R.C.,
Have you considered a cash incentive?

Dear Mrs. Bitch,

With the Thanksgiving season upon us, it behooves each one of us to take a few moments to reflect upon the blessings the good Lord has bestowed upon on, each and severally. This year, the Amherst chapter of the Daughters of the Mayflower is asking prominent ladies in the community to tell us what they are thankful for, so that we may share these "pearls of wisdom" with all and sundry.

- Mrs. Abigail M. Dickinson
Amherst

P.S. I understand that your ancestors on your mother's side came over on the Mayflower.

Dear Abby,

Big Bitch is thankful that the good Lord has so ordained that there be so many faithful husbands out there who are so bored with sex with their lawful wedded wives that they are willing to pay good money to spice up their sorry existences. By the way, tell Charles that Friday afternoon will work just fine for me.

P.S. Indeed! There was Nancy Bottoms - and believe me, she wasn't called that for nothing.

Dear - Big - Bitch -

My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun -
In Corners - till a Day
The Owner passed - identified -
And carried Me away -
- E.D.
"Safe in her Alabaster
Chamber"
Behind the Mobil Station
Amherst

Dear Em,

It's so-o-o true! Happy
Thanksgiving!

Remember: ASK BIG BITCH needs your letters to keep her hot and wet (and this column alive!). Send your queries to Big Bitch c/o VMag via E-mail at "vcromag@aol.com".



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Editor-

This is in response to your "VMag Field Guide to Valley Gangs" in issue 12. In it, there is a section on white supremacist gangs and organizations. You address skinheads, but your attempts are misguided. Many skinheads are not racist at all. I am saddened to see yet another publication re-enforcing these stereotypes.

I would like to clear up a few things about skinheads by quoting an article from the fall 1997 issue of *On The Prowl*, Anti Racist Action Toronto's newsletter. This was written by a 17-year old Jewish skin whose name was not published:

"Skinheads are among the most misunderstood youth subcultures. To the general public the sight of boots and braces (suspenders) triggers images of white power hate mongers who seek to violently eliminate immigrants and minorities from our communities. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

"Dating back to the origins of the skinhead subculture, it is clear that this has always been a movement that embraced racial unity... The first distinct traces of skinhead influence came from 2 sources: Mods and Jamaican rude boys... Mods were youths who hoped to break from the 50's 'rocker' image... They wore suits with three buttons, Fred Perrys, creepers and other clothes thought outrageous in those days... Like skinheads, mods hung out in crews and were always ready to fight their opposition.... Most importantly, however, the mods were a working class subculture... It's clear that skinheads didn't originate from right wing ideology... mods were a racially diverse group... The music they enjoyed was influenced by R&B and other genres with Black roots.... the true multi culturalism of the skinhead movement was not present until the late 60's when England received immigrants from the West Indies, particularly Jamaica.

"Jamaica at the time had its own working class subculture, the Rude Boys... they were tougher than tough... the skinheads... fell in love with ska, the music of choice for Rude Boys. Only with the ska influence was the skinhead movement strongly defined.... the term whigger (used currently as an insult to white people who "act Black") was first applied to skinheads. This manifested around 1969, known as the glory year of the skinhead subculture. These were years when there was no politics involved in the skinhead movement.

"In 1974 the National Front, the British Fascist party needed troops to violently promote its scene... the skins were street tough and so desired by the NF. Some did join. Skinheads are divided in views on race just as people in any other culture or subculture. The working class is prone to ideas of the far right. White working class people are an easy target for fascists who claim that economic problems are caused by immigrants. Some skins sided with the NF because of high unemployment and other economic issues.

"Hoping to ride on the reputation of real skinheads, the NF started dressing up NF youths like skinheads. Another subculture had emerged, one based on fascism and the dream of an Aryan nation. These were the boneheads.

"Skinheads have established organizations with the hope of separating and smashing these nazi posers from the true skinheads. SHARP (SkinHeads Against Racial Prejudice) was established in 1989 and was very successful in driving boneheads out of their cities... In the early 1980's a skinhead named Bishop formed RASH (Red and Anarchist SkinHeads), an organization grouping skinheads with leftist views. Because socialism and anarchism are the politics of the working class, the 2 go hand in hand.

"What remains most important is that one does not become a skinhead because of one political orientation or another. This said it's also important that one must not reject skinhead politics simply because of appearance."

If you would like more information, please contact ARA at their main headquarters in Columbus at:

ARA Columbus
P.O. Box 82097
Columbus, OH 43202

Or to get the complete article and the newsletter it came from, contact ARA Toronto at:

Anti-Racist Action
P.O. Box 291, Stn. B
Toronto, ON M5T 2T2
Canada

- Becca Gullberg, age 18
Wilbraham
E-mail 10/8/98

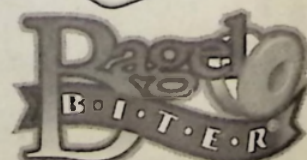
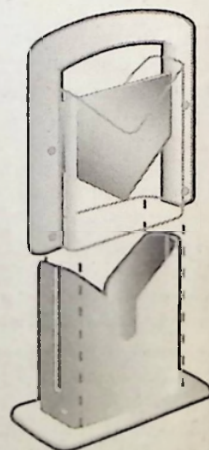


NEXT ISSUE:
dancing with the big boys
AVAILABLE DECEMBER 9

"I just need a little SPACE!"

We've all been there: You get a great idea, need to remember a phone number, have to sketch something, draw a map, write down a lyric... and there's no paper anywhere. The next time this happens, help will be as close as a copy of VMag. Through issue 13, Larien Products (a great little Northampton company) will sponsor this "creativity page." Now, when you get hit with a brainstorm or just need to put something down on paper, grab the nearest writing implement and a copy of VMag and GO WILD!

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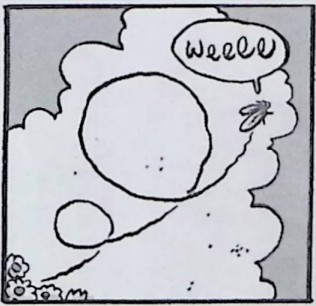
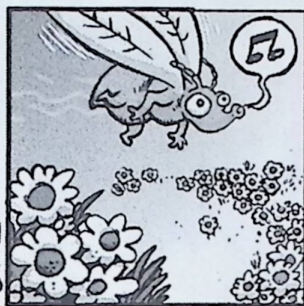
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GOT ROCK?

